THE WATERMARK

A Journal of the Arts • University of Massachusetts • Boston

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THE WATERMARK

Managing Editor

STAN KAPLAN

Fiction

ANGELA CARELLA
IAN GOLD
YUK-TAI MAN
CATHERINE O'REILLY

Non-fiction

ANNELI MYNTTINEN
PHILIP WILLIAMS

Poetry

NORM OPPEGARD
MARA KLEIN
ANNE SAYRE
LORI BYRNE

Art

TOM GREALY

Production

STAN KAPLAN
JANET WILLARD
MARA KLEIN
MEESH McCARTHY

EDITOR'S NOTE

I'd like to thank all who were associated with *The Watermark* this year and recall one of our great successes: the learning process. *The Watermark* is student-run and produced; the work in it is student work; printing costs are covered by student fees. Those who benefit are you, the students who read *The Watermark;* students who have learned to produce and polish work; students who learn how to improve work (and submit again); and us, the editors and staff.

This year we all learned more by producing a preliminary publication, *Waterworks*. Producing *Waterworks* gave writers and artists another chance to see their work in print; and it gave us a chance to run through the process of getting submissions, making selections, and producing a publication.

This year more of our staff learned about production We instituted a system in which production assistants worked on stories or poems brought in by writers on disk, not in *The Watermark* office, but in school computer labs or at home. Using standard word processing programs they made the text uniform, and copied the text to a file with prepared margins, fonts, and titles. Finally, these files were collated in our office computer, printed out, checked, and turned over to the printer.

Of course the selection and editorial process is all-important to you writers and artists. I watched the poetry editors at work: each editor received a xerox of each of about 250 poems (with only a student number for identification). When the editors met two weeks later, they compared their piles of yeses, maybes and a few contested nos. The final selections were made by voting (I kept tally). One hour later, our computer database had produced a list of names . . .

Finally, what writers can learn about rejected submissions: Poetry editors agreed that there were many talented poets who submitted work that was somehow flawed or that was promising but needed work. Many of the selected poems, it turns out, have been worked on in creative writing workshops. We urge students who write to enroll in writing courses and work on their writing; learning the craft in intro courses and receiving feedback in workshops will increase your chances of publication immeasurably.

Special thanks to Donna Neal and the folks at Student Life.

About *The Watermark*

The Watermark publishes its third volume this year having succeeded *Howth Castle* and *Wavelength* as UMass Boston's journal of the arts. *The Watermark* appears each year in late April.

Join *The Watermark* Staff

A journal like *The Watermark* is not an easy undertaking but there are many rewards. Working on *The Watermark* staff provides students with a chance to become invoved in the planning and production of a major publication. Before the end of the semester we will hold meetings for next year's staff. We invite students from all areas to join our staff. Call (617) 287-7960 or stop by our office located on the fifth floor of McCormack Hall, room 407.

Submit Your Work

Any UMB student is encouraged to submit work for the up-coming edition of *The Watermark*. General guidelines follow:

We ask for blind submissions. That is, only your student ID number should appear on the work. All other information about yourself should be on a separate cover sheet and include your name, student ID number, address, phone number, title of your work, and type of work.

Written work should be typed and not exceed 4,500 words. Fiction and non-fiction should be double-spaced and submitted in duplicate. Poems should be typed as you wish them to appear and submitted in triplicate. Weseek all types of written work including essays, commentaries, short stories, poems, plays, humor, etc. We ask that you limit the total number of submissions to no more than five pieces.

Artwork includes prints, line drawings, collages, paintings, computer art, photography, etc. Please bear in mind that these need to be reproduced (and often reduced). Again please limit your total submissions to no more than five.

We are willing to work with you if you encounter any problems with these guidelines. Please call us at 287-7960.

CONTENTS

fiction

KATE YOUNG CALEY	THE REAL CAROLINE	1
MARÍA CISTERNA	LA HISTORIA DE LAS MUJERES QUE SE EMPACHABAN Y PERDÍAN A SUS MARIDOS	16
	THE STORY OF SOME WOMEN WHO GORGED THEMSELVES AND LOST THEIR HUSBANDS	20
ANDREW GEBAUER	WHAT I NEED	32
MARC D. GOLDFINGER	I LOVE NO ONE BUT YOU	44
YUK TAI MAN	HER CLEANEST, SHARPEST KNIFE	62
JENNY McCRACKEN	LE MISTRAL	63
THOMAS O'MALLEY	SAMHAIN	71

non-fiction

SARAH BURKHARDT	A KNIGHT OF CHIVALRY & LOVE: ONE WOMAN'S SEARCH	2
JULIET C. GLAUBER	EMIL & GUSTI	42
ANDREA M. HIGGINS	WITH LIBERTY & JUSTICE AND THE ARTS FOR ALL	56
RICHARD SHEEHAN	NHUNG	76
TANYA STUBBS	STARING DOWN TIME	79

poetry

SCATHA G. ALLISON	*untitled*	1
DEBBIE BYRNE	At Grandfather's House	8
KATE YOUNG CALEY	Winter, At Last Done	10
LESLIE CHALMERS	Perpendicular Universe	15
NANCY CLOUGHERTY	The Snowy Streets at Night	24
	Visceral	25
MATTHEW COLANTONIO	Sizzle	26
	Throwing Instructions	27
ALLAN COLE	For Now	28
	Jersey Smile	29
JACKIE CORNOG	Sleep	30
GREGORY M. ELAM	i was, not was i	31
MATTHEW GILLESPIE	Tired	39
JULIET C. GLAUBER	Communication	40
	Killing Time	41
NANCY HEWITT	Your Edges	54
	The Way Things Die	55
HEATHER KAPPLOW	Enamel	61
MARGUERITE E. McGRAIL	Drown	69
LINDA McMASTER	(word) Edgewise	70
RENATA ROSKOPF	One in a Million	75
GRIFFIN URBANIAK	the lost night	80
JANET E. WILLARD	Misery	82

art

	color	after page 43
	black and white	after page 60
STEPHEN A. BAILEY		title page
		detail, front cover
EK SISAMOUT		back cover

SCATHA G. ALLISON

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untitled

crisp like fresh lettuce
your lies
crunched in your teeth
disgusted
I wiped ranch dressing
off of your chin

SARAH BURKHARDT

A KNIGHT OF CHIVALRY & LOVE: ONE WOMAN'S SEARCH

(This story examines the question (*demande d'amour*) of Love and Chivalry, a central theme in Chretien de Troyes' "Knight of the Cart.")

In the eleven hundred seventieth year of our Lord, Chretien de Troyes completed *The Knight of The Cart*, a romance narrative capturing the essence of the greatest earthly knight known to man, Sir Lancelot du Lake. It is a tale of love and adventure, peril and deceit—one man's quest for Queen Guinevere's favor. It is truly a wondrous tale even to a humble clerk like myself, who knows nothing of the delicate ways of court. To some, Chretien's work proves love and chivalry are inseparable, but others see his tale working against the true calling of knighthood. It has been discussed in many courts and halls and never have the two sides met to shake hands. I myself have no opinion for my station is only to list and record what will be told presently.

—William, Clerk of Tintagel

* * *

The New Year Day has risen from Winter's relentless grip. There is no sun to join our festivities; the villainous wind and its unwanted companion, rain, beat furiously at our doors. Our protector Tintagel,[1] shields us from the worst; even Neptune's rage cannot penetrate the old man's stone-wrought armor. All day I have been working, keeping the fires tended and bringing cloaks to the knights and ladies. The long and tireless effort barking orders to my underlings has produced handsome results, for as I look about this grand feast-hall, there is not one frown to be seen. By the way, I hope you did not think a man like myself would perform tasks so demeaning in nature. I am, after all, the head man-servant. Just look at my cloak—this is pure minx! No common man could wear such a piece with the absolute grace I do. Now then, I will continue. The hall is warmed with the presence of jovial games, music, poetry and the telling of stories. One tale, by a French bard, which produced quite a scoff by King Mark when he heard it told. Anyway, the room itself threatens to burst apart with

laughter and high spirits. Spirits indeed, since my boys brought the good, strong wine from the cellar. I shall make my way to King Mark,[2] seated by the fire. He may have need for something; I certainly have need to obtain gossip. Do not be alarmed: the winter is long and news from the outside is slow. We must all amuse ourselves somehow.

"What did you think of the reading today, my Lord?" Isolde[3] looks beautiful. Now that I am so close I see her hunter-green gown reflects the color of her lively eyes.

"Isolde, you know how I feel—those verses from the French are babble." King Mark is a hard man, in choler and mind. The red he wears tonight looks harsh against his skin but royal nonetheless.

"Babble or not, one cannot deny that Lancelot of the Lake is the perfect knight."

"My dear." He lowers his voice—I can barely hear him. "That was just a story. A true knight of our times would never fall prey to a woman's mere fancy. A knight above all else values chivalry and brotherhood."

"You speak strange words, for a man who has not been married yet five years." She is wonderful when her voice rises in challenge.

"You are my queen and lady. I value you above any other but I must not forget I am a king and knight first. My love for you is constant and true; however, I would not be so forlorn in your love as to be 'laid . . . flat in the center of the ford'" (179). His laughter bellows and echoes around the room like a restless, forgotten soul. I cross myself.

"Yes, my king, it does *sound* silly but it is the power of Love." Where does her eye wander to? Ah yes, she seems to have caught the eye of Tristan,[4] who is standing by a great wall tapestry in a rich cloak of midnight-blue. He raises his cup to her in a sign of good-health and good-will. It is truly an innocent gesture but the kitchen women, Mary and Alice, say they know otherwise. More than just kinship they share, so they say, as they cackle over their meats and stews." Love can make one 'rich, powerful, and bold in every enterprise' (177-8). Forget not how Lancelot repaid the knight who dealt him that blow. The knight of the ford fled for his life and it was only by the 'mercy' of Lancelot that he lived (181). Is that not knightliness?"

"Isolde, you speak well. It is evident you listened closely as the bard spoke. I have evidence, though, that your wit will not defeat. Lancelot, a valiant knight, yes, and one cannot deny he was true to his Queen; however, he was also a vassal of King Arthur. In his love to Guinevere he was betraying his King." King Mark sits back in his chair. He seems very satisfied with himself; he sips his wine with a grin.

She smiles back. Her eyes narrow in a sly manner; she is readying her reply. "*Touche* my Lord. I accept your challenge but be *en garde* for my hauberk-piercing answer. Although Lancelot was sworn as a knight to Arthur, his heart was bound to Guinevere and above all else he must honor her wishes. The night he came to her in her chamber was not unlike the tournament. At both times he obeyed her command. A knight who takes a lover cannot deny her anything; it is a rule of courtly love."[5]

"Well done, but you have not answered the charge of treason. His affair was not with the farrier's daughter—it was with his King's wife! A knight who values chivalry cannot allow himself to be caught in such games. It is much like his folly of riding in a cart[6] like a 'convicted criminal'" (174). He waves his hand as if to rid himself of an annoying fly.

"Lancelot was like no other knight. As the story says, 'there was no such knight alive' (194). He was the most brave, most valiant and he achieved feats no one could ever imagine! Remember he lifted the 'slab' from the tomb 'more easily than ten men would have done' (193). His lifting the tomb's lid was prophecy. He would be the one to free the people of the wicked land which held them captive." Isolde speaks with such emotion—she must pause for a breath. "He shone with such greatness, even a knight's father he had never met before saw it in him immediately. The father went as far as to bind his son before he would let him fight (192). He was the perfect knight in every way. A knight like Lancelot will come only once in a lifetime. He is above any other knight, a herald of a new knighthood."

"If this is the case, my dear, then we should abandon our faith—faith in God, in chivalry—abandon all our beliefs! Let every knight do as he wishes and never mind Mass! Just go to your lover's bed and kneel there in adoration, as did the wondrous Lancelot!" His face reddens and not from wine.

Her tone softens. "My Lord, that is not my meaning. Lancelot is an ideal; he is perfection. The story is of feats no one could ever accomplish. I feel the story brings a new way of thinking. A knight can no longer can be measured just by his chivalry and his prowess. A knight must be privy to courtly matters and he must know his heart." Again she glances at young Tristan speaking with other knights of Cornwall.

"Isolde, this is England, not a mythical place in some Frenchman's mind." He speaks as if weary. He begins again with a deep sigh. "I take more stock in the Welshman's story *Culwch and Olwen*,[7] or Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of Kings*.[8] They speak of a knighthood I know and trust, and I do think even the end of

Chretien's story relies on this trust of the knighthood I hold dear. When Lancelot escapes from the tower and returns to Camelot, there is no talk of Love. There is a mere breath given to Guinevere's happiness in seeing Lancelot again, but Lancelot shows no sign that she has even entered into his thoughts. His former passion seems to have cooled considerably since they last met. Lancelot was bent on avenging the wrong against him. He fought against hatred and for his honor. He cut off evil Meleagant's head thinking only, 'Never again would Meleagant deceive him' (256). The story ends with combat and a victory celebration. Love might be a notion but a knight is not judged by his affections; he is judged on the battlefield."

"My Lord, Chretien did not write the end of the story. Someone else, a 'clerk,' wrote the ending (256). It is clear he does not share the same view of Love as Chretien." She follows Tristan with her eyes as he walks toward them.

"That too says something, no? Why did Chretien not write the end himself? This weakness in the story says to me he is not sure himself, or this *new* knight. It is but a story to fill a woman's head with fancy thoughts. Isolde, come tell me when you find a man to pull 'iron window bars from the wall' (227), who will accept defeat in a tournament because his lady 'command[s] him to do his worst' (238). This will be a man I would like to meet." He laughs heartily at his own joke. He turns to acknowledge Tristan who has been standing beside him. "My good nephew Tristan, you have heard what I have just spoke. Do you know such a man?"

"My Lord Mark, if I do, I will ask him if his lady can compare to our Queen Isolde." He bows gracefully low and his eyes never leave Isolde's ivory face.

King Mark rises and puts his hand on Tristan's shoulder. Standing together they look like the pillars of knighthood, strong with the subdued weariness of soldiers. "I see the day's reading and wine has affected your heart-strings. You and Isolde can discuss this "Knight of the Cart" story further: I myself have no use for its foolishness. I must see how the rest of my court is faring." He turns to me, probably wanting to tell me what a thorough job I have done today. But yet he scowls?

"Esson, what are you doing standing there? Haven't you duties other than listening to your King's conversations?"

"Um, my Lord, I was just . . ." Think, Esson, think!

"Also, is that not my cloak your wearing? I told you to get that for me, not wear it! Give it to me and get on with your business!" He walks away, away from me; thank you, God, cross myself. Now if I could just get close enough to Isolde and Tristan to hear what they are saying.

"My lady Isolde, I have found your Lancelot." I'm too far away—what did he say?! "I have got your throwing lots"?

"Good Tristan, do you not think chivalry and Love pull a man's heart in two different directions?" She looks to him with that Love in her eyes.

"Not at all. Without Love there is nothing to fight for." He bows very low to her and they part. Part, and not even a final glance to each other. Aah, I will never know what they were saying now.

Bibliography

1. Lacy, Norris J., ed. *The Arthurian Encyclopedia.* New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1987.

2. Troyes, Chretien. "The Knight of the Cart." In *The Complete Romances of Chretien de Troyes.* Edited and Translated by David Staines. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990, pp. 170-256.

* * *

Endnotes

1. Tintagel: Our good King Mark's castle is located on the coast of beloved Cornwall. It has always been the stronghold of choice, for the sea provides natural protection from any invading army. In the famous tale, King Arthur was conceived at Tintagel, when one night King Uther gained accesss to Lady Igraine.

2. King Mark: It is rumored he comes between the love of his wife Isolde and his nephew Tristan. Some say he can be a rash man, quick to anger and slow to cool. I once heard he has threatened Tristan with death in these fits of his. There would not be any surprise felt in Tintagel, if one day King Mark murdered Tristan.

3. Isolde: She is the daughter of an Irish king, who was promised to King Mark and brought to Cornwall by his nephew Tristan. One of Isolde's ladies told me Tristan and Isolde drank a love potion by mistake and now have eyes for no one, except each other.

4. Tristan: The great knight of Cornwall, whose fame is only equalled by the heroic legend of Lancelot. He has achieved great honor, rising above his sad birth which his name reflects: Tristan means, unhappy (unlucky) one. Honorable and valiant no one dare breaths an unfair word about him. If he does love Isolde like it is rumored, it can only bring the hardship and pain which are the fated ends to a love hidden in darkness, surrounded by scandal. God save him.

5. Courtly Love: The Love of court. The knight or other worthy man of court must be the lady's vassal, denying her no wish or desire. The boons they receive may grant them a smile and if worthy, they may even enter a lady's private rooms. Chretien himself gave us this extraordinary idea and since then, it has become the fashion of courtly ideals and parlor games.

6. Cart: Riding in a cart is the most demeaning way for man to be viewed by his neighbors. Its use is reserved for the common thief and criminal being taken to prison.

7. *Culwch and Olwen:* Our famous Arthur in this tale performs splendid heroic deeds, as he battles many villainous characters from the old Celtic songs.

8. *The History of the Kings of Britain:* Monmouth's account written in the eleven hundred- thirty-fifth year of our Lord. His *History* provides us today with the first detailed account of Arthur's career.

DEBBIE BYRNE

At Grandfather's House

I have little waffle marks from
pressing my nose into the screen-
door. Outside, the wind hits the trees.
Loosening leaves slap my grandfather
like hundreds of little hands. He has
just pruned his roses for the last time
this season. Before he pruned the roses,
he kicked the dog. Behind a tree,
the dog shivers and waits.
Beside grandfather, a bucket
of water. In it are dead chipmunks
who had made a maze of tunnels
a few inches under his lawn. They
made him angry. Makes my yard
cave in, he says. He lives in a
neighborhood where everyone
is "nice." They have that look. The "nice"
look. At night, spirits of the dead
moan and try to clean house.
Scattered dust falls on the wings of moths
and is flown away before dawn.
In his house—an immaculate den.
Very manly: dark leathers, plaid cushions,
animal heads on the walls. Above the desk
a painting of a DeLorean with red interior.
A handprint smudge on the right rear fender.
In his garage—shovels and sledgehammers
with dark stains. He lives near
a vacant lot which looks like someone's been
digging in it. Mounds of dirt look
flattened. You could trip trying to cross that lot.
He has taken his knife
and scratched his name into every tree
on his property. Yesterday, he pried the mailbox
off the front door and put it in the basement. I turn
and watch him as he goes into the bathroom

at the end of the hall. For a long time
he looks at himself in the mirror.
As he crosses the kitchen, he looks at me
with his bathroom eyes.

KATE YOUNG CALEY

Winter, At Last Done

I walk the yard, surveying
winter, at last done.
A branch of broken lilac
hangs, torn in fibrous strands,
raking the ground, wasted.
The oldest arborvitae leans in boggy soil,
revealing a mountain laurel gone leggy.
And down back, over flat stones slippery
with leaves, dark and wet as liver,
the children's swing hangs waiting in damp, March air.
Melted snow reveals
what we have lost this winter.
Besides the rest,
a ridiculous number of lone mittens
stuck to the ground, by the slide,
the playhouse, near the fence,
the judas bud.
Five or eight or ten mittens,
flat and folded over, forgotten
by my careless daughters while each morning
I search, inadequate,
and send them into the world unmatched.
I peel stiff hands from the clutch
of frozen dirt. And above me, a single crow
balances at the highest point
of my tallest tree and scolds
this little world.
I lean my head, my arms, my shoulders back,
and laugh and laugh at him and all the things in life
that I can save, that I do.

KATE YOUNG CALEY

THE REAL CAROLINE

My name is Caroline. "Like Caroline Kennedy," is how my mother always introduced me. She adored the Kennedys, especially the president. She used his first name, like she knew him personally: Jack this and Jack that she'd say to friends as she sat with the phone pressed to her ear and gazed into his framed inaugural picture with the American flag.

I am a woman now, grown, with a young child of my own and it is many years since my mother died. I think about her, though, as if she just walked out of the room, and will be back any minute. And this is something I have learned about death: there is so much that *isn't* final about it.

The other day I was having lunch with Anne and Jean, old friends from college. Jean had married well and lived upstate on a horse farm. It had one of those long straight driveways lined with enormous trees, and bright, clean barns with lots of horses.

We piled our plates with expensive produce I never buy: mounds of curly lettuces and fragrant herbs, and thick bread made in the recently renovated kitchen. I was thinking how much my mother would like to see me at a fancy lunch like this. I remembered her standing one night over a greasy stove, as she fried up shiny, round slices of baloney in a cast iron pan. "I doubt the Kennedy's are eating baloney tonight," she had said and cried large, sloppy tears she hadn't bothered to wipe away.

Anne nudged me with her elbow, "Caroline, I said isn't it just like a magazine?" and we laughed together at Jean's good luck.

Our children were outside playing. There were elaborate tree houses built by Jean's hired man and a pool we had promised to let the kids use after lunch. But what kept them busy now was this huge trampoline, bigger even than the one we had at our local school. The kids took turns seeing who could jump the highest and do the silliest turns.

It was nice to have them occupied so we could eat in peace. "For once," we all laughed and Jean poured more wine into each of three, tall glasses shining on the table. We had already finished one bottle and were getting pretty giggly.

Jean was showing us pictures of the new furniture she had ordered and I started to tell the story about the time my mother found a

rocking chair in the trash. It had one arm missing but she brought it home and painted it all different shades of blues and greens to look the way she imagined the ocean off Hyannisport. Then she stuck a picture of JFK to the back with layers and layers of white glue. It didn't dry right, so his face came out all bubbly and clouded over in a way she found frightening. One night I came home and found her sitting in the chair, completely still with the sticky, torn up picture in her hand.

I saw Anne and Jean glance at each other and stopped my story. I hadn't meant to go that far, to where it wasn't funny.

The hired man was busy fixing a loose board on the porch just outside the huge windows where we sat and he looked up, expressionless. I imagined what he was thinking: three women picking at fancy salads and getting slightly drunk in the middle of the day. It looked like our lives were easy.

I started to whisper to Anne as Jean went for more salad dressing, I wanted to know if she thought he had heard what I said, but she was laughing at something Jean called from the kitchen. They were laughing very hard. I missed it.

I excused myself and went to the guest bathroom. I leaned against the wall and remembered the last time I spoke with my mother. I had left Ohio for college out East. My mother had talked all summer about the football games and cocktail parties I'd be invited to and the tan, curly haired Kennedy cousins I would meet.

That last time she called she said, "I just read Caroline Kennedy is going to law school. Imagine that?" Her voice was very breathy and I could tell she'd had too much to drink. "Wouldn't Jack have been thrilled?"

"I don't think it would have surprised him much," I said, slowly outlining the concrete blocks of the dorm wall with my finger.

These are the stories I tell about my mother. I tell them to anyone who will listen. Sometimes when I talk about her it sounds funny, like she had a quirk or a peculiarity, that's all. Sometimes I feel the room get all quiet, tense, because I am talking about something that should never be mentioned: the mother who drank herself to death. People do not want to hear that.

But still I tell the stories. I tell them because maybe if I say enough I will come to understand.

I want to understand why I couldn't save her.

The little window in Jean's bathroom was stuck I but tried to open it because my face was hot and I needed air. The casing was swollen with humidity but I pulled hard and it finally gave.

I could see the kids standing around the edge of the trampoline, laughing and calling to Jean's daughter who jumped higher and

higher doing leg splits and midair somersaults. I held onto the thin edge of the window to still my balance.

Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a movement. Actually, it was more that I felt it. I felt something was wrong, and it was happening in slow motion. I shook my head to help me think better.

Then I saw. It was Jillie, Anne's youngest daughter. She was inside the gate of the pool. Somehow it was open and she was in there, running right toward the water. I watched her step off the concrete edge of the pool as if its turquoise surface were glass and that glass would hold her safe. Then she fell in.

I turned and ran for the front door, tripping on a basket of cookbooks as I slid around a corner in the kitchen. I yelled to Anne and Jean as I stumbled down the stairs of the front porch and ran hard across the long driveway to the pool.

But I saw the whole thing as if I watched myself from somewhere above: I saw that it was taking too long to get there, that I fumbled with the gate, and pulled off my linen blazer before I jumped in, and that all of these movements were too slow. I heard Anne and Jean who came, laughing, onto the porch to see what on earth I was doing.

And just before I jumped into the pool, where Jillie hung, face down in the turquoise hue, I turned and saw Anne's face. I saw the way it changed the way her eyes came into focus and the lines around them smoothed out and pulled her mouth in a scream I would hear even underwater.

I jumped in the pool and Jillie sloshed out of my reach. I cried out and ran at her through the chest deep water pushing my weight as against a wall. My hands grabbed her at the waist and I lifted her above me and she hung there–small, limp body–looking at me with her stunned eyes, opening and closing her mouth without sound.

Then Anne was in the water too, crying and reaching for her child. I pushed Jillie into her arms and turned and threw up in my hands. Tiny bits of radiccio and red pepper slipped through my fingers and floated on pool water in a puddle of pink wine and oil. I wiped my mouth with the back of my hand and held it there as I watched Anne hold her daughter. We could not seem to get our breath, any of us.

I looked up.The hired man was standing above me, his body framed in the white glare of the sun. I took his outstretched hand and with one strong pull he helped me from the water.

"Don't you wish you could always save them?" he asked and handed me a thick towel from a pile on the table nearby.

I didn't know what to say. I tried to think what he might have heard and pushed back through all that had happened and all of the

wine that still sloshed in my head to remember what stories I had told. Did he know I hadn't saved my mother? Or maybe I didn't even say that.

My mother is so often on my mind I think everyone else is thinking about her too. But I suppose that isn't so.

We left not long after that. It was hard to know what else to do. The kids fell asleep in the backseat by the time we reached the highway and though the car was silent my head was loud with a buzz like cicadas in late summer. The smell of chlorine lifted on moist air from our clothes and towels.

"Caroline." Anne started to speak but first turned to make sure the kids were all asleep. "I don't want to tell anyone about what happened today, okay? I don't want this to turn into an entertaining story over wine some night on the porch."

"I wouldn't do that," I said and looked out the window at the long rows of cornfields we passed.

"But you might, the way you get telling a story and suddenly it sounds okay." She looked at me to be sure I was really listening. "Those stories about your mother and the Kennedy's: sometimes you make them sound so funny but really it was sad, Caroline. Don't make this story like that."

I knew what she meant but her words felt hot on my face like a slap.

The night my mother died she left a note. It said she couldn't go on. *I have loved you, Caroline, and tried to make you worthy of your name.*

But did she, really, ever know my worth? That is something I will never know.

So I just nod to my friend, who drives along waiting for me to speak and I say, "Not everything makes a good story."

And she nods too. I see her rub her face and start to cry and I cry then with her, because we both know, too well, what really happens sometimes.

LESLIE CHALMERS

Perpendicular Universe

In a perpendicular universe
I intersect with myself
Wave hello
Ask me how I am
Okay, and you
Did I hear
my response?
I kept passing by

At this cross in the road
I think I look pretty good
going the other way
and say
hey, she's got it together
perhaps I should take that turn
go down that road there
that she's on

And both of me turn around

MARÍA CISTERNA

LA HISTORIA DE LAS MUJERES QUE SE EMPACHABAN Y PERDÍAN A SUS MARIDOS

Rosa se había escapado de Italia con su novio y se fueron a vivir a Argentina para comenzar una nueva vida. Ninguno de los dos tenía dinero y tuvieron alquilar una pensión cerca del puerto hasta que pudieran comprar su propia casa. El marido trabajaba todo el día y a veces ni volvía de noche. Rosa supo entonces que jamás podría quedar embarazada si su marido nunca estaba en casa y cuando finalmente volvía, y ella lo esperaba con su camisón de seda rosada que ella misma había bordado, el pobre se quedaba dormido tan rápidamente que Rosa jamás logró quitarse el camisón de la misma manera que ella lo había practicado cuando era niña.

Finalmente una noche, harta de tanto esperar, fue a la cocina, buscó la olla más grande que pudo encontrar y se puso a preparar un tónico para saciar la soledad que sólo ella conocía porque lo había soñado la noche que tuvo su primer ciclo menstrual. Recordó que lo único que debía cocinar eran todas esas cosas que a ella le fascinaban: diez kilos de chocolate de Bariloche, cinco kilos de frutillas, tres cucharadas de dulce de leche, media botella de vino blanco. De este modo empezó a comer con deleite, cucharada por cucharada, hasta el final de la olla, hasta que estaba tan empalagada que no pudo dejar de hacer arcadas por horas enteras. A pesar de esta indigestión, Rosa se encontraba tan satisfecha, tan extraña y tan plena que se quedó tirada en el piso de la cocina hasta que su marido la encontró casi inconciente, una semana más tarde.

Cuando el marido de Rosa se enteró de que ella estaba embarazada, se indignó tanto por no haber participado en la creación de su hijo que decidió irse porque supo que jamás podría vivir con una mujer que no lo necesitase ni para procrear. Nunca le creyó a su mujer la historia del tónico y Rosa tampoco intentó convencerlo. Por suerte ella tuvo mellizas así que no tuvo que volver a tomar ese tónico, que a pesar de ser un manjar, la dejó casi hipnotizada por mucho tiempo, hasta el punto que todas las mujeres del barrio creyeron que se había vuelto loca porque de vez en cuando salía de su casa sin sostén ni zapatos.

Rosa y las mellizas vivieron modestamente por muchos años. Rosa trabajaba en su casa lavando ropa para familias ricas, Ernestina cocinaba pasteles para las panaderías del vecindario y Betty era

secretaria en una empresa extranjera que después de algunos años la envió a trabajar a los Estados Unidos. Rosa y Ernestina se quedaron solas, aunque el vecindario siempre creyó que vivían con más personas por el bochinche que hacían. Como las dos se matenían por medio de la cocina y de la lavandería, siempre estaban en su casa y sólo salían por la mañana para hacer las compras necesarias. De tarde, después de la siesta, las dos comenzaban a cantar, con todas sus fuerzas, canciones que inventaban en el momento con los ingredientes de las recetas de las tortas de Ernestina. Los vecinos comprendían esta locura ya que sabían de la desgracia de estas mujeres. Entendían que cantaban por la falta de hombres en la casa, por eso nadie se molestaba, aparte, sus tortas eran tan sabrosas y tan creativas que valía la pena escuchar estas voces desafinadas.

Un día Ernestina fue a comprar los huevos para la torta del día cuando vio en el almacén a un hombre con la mirada más hermosa y más pacífica que ella jamás hubiera visto. Este hombre era ciego pero Ernestina no se había dado cuenta, ella creía que era simplemente un poco lento y que necesitaba más tiempo que los demás para observar el mundo y los objetos. Debido a esta misma lentitud, Ernestina se casó con él. Ella sabía ciertas características de los hombres que su madre le había contado y sabía que si era ciego, el resto de sus sentidos iban a estar muy desarrollados, cosa indispensable en el negocio de las tortas.

Rosa nunca le contó a Ernestina cómo ella había venido al mundo, ni ella misma sabía verdaderamente el efecto que el tónico iba a causar en la vida de sus hijas ni de sus nietos. Al poco tiempo Ernestina quedó embarazada y había engordado tanto que su marido tenía que dormir en el sofá para no estorbarla. Una noche Ernestina se levantó sin despertarse, fue directamente a la cocina y comenzó a cocinar sin saber lo que estaba haciendo. Agarró una olla, le agregó frutillas, chocolate y el resto de los elementos del tónico de su madre y se los comió. Le había quedado tan rico que su propia bebé se dio cuenta del placer en el que se encontraba su madre y decidió salir al mundo solamente para probar el mazacote que la madre estaba saboreando. El marido, intrigado al sentir que madre e hija estaban comiendo de la olla tan deliciosamente, agarró una cuchara y comió también. No pasaron ni cinco segundos cuando comenzó a vomitar desaforadamente y a gritar por el gran dolor de estómago que estaba sufriendo. Así fue que el tónico mató al pobre hombre, dejando a las dos mujeres solas, tiradas en el piso, y con tanto chocolate por todo el cuerpo que era dificil distinguir cuál era la madre y cuál era la hija. Cuando Rosa se enteró de lo sucedido comprendió el efecto de su tónico tan maravilloso aunque siempre las dejaba sin maridos. Ernestina sólo tuvo tiempo de llorar a su esposo por un día ya que la beba era muy pequeña y requería de mucha atención.

Después de la muerte del esposo de Ernestina, el vecindario comenzó a sospechar de esta familia que no podía retener a sus maridos. No comprendían por qué estos hombres desaparecían con tanta rapidéz. Lo escandaloso era que nadie jamás había visto ni a Ernestina ni a Rosa de luto y esto causaba demasiada sospecha entre las mujeres del barrio, que creían que ellas habían hecho algo para desligarse de estos buenos hombres. Los únicos vestidos negros que tenían eran los de su juventud, cuando en forzadas ocasiones habían tenido que acudir al entierro de algún conocido. Después de los tónicos, estos vestidos ya no les entraban más porque habían engordado tanto tanto que tenían que sacrificar las cortinas de la casa para poder vestirse.

Olivia, la hija de Ernestina, creció y se transformó en una mujer tan hermosa que no le faltó quien se enamorase de ella. Su madre y su abuela, ya cansadas y aburridas de no tener marido, hicieron lo imposible para que Olivia pudiera casarse y tener una familia que le durara más de una semana. Pero lamentablemente todo el pueblo ya sabía del futuro que le esperaba a cualquier hombre que se casara con cualquiera de estas mujeres. Entonces, aunque todos se enamoraban de Olivia, ninguno se atrevía a arriesgarse a pedir la mano de esta muchacha. Después de mucho intentar, la madre y la abuela finalmente le encontraron un candidato, un joven extranjero que jamás había oído la historia de la familia quien, sin pensarlo, aceptó casarse tan rápido como pudiese.

A pesar de que Ernestina y Rosa querían fervientemente que Olivia se casara, estaban bastante asustadas ya que temían que de alguna forma Olivia descifrase la fórmula del tónico y que terminara matando a su marido. Fue entonces cuando decidieron empacharse con el tónico usando hasta el último cajón de frutillas, todos los chocolates, el último tarro de dulce de leche y hasta las últimas botellas de vino blanco que quedaban en el pueblo. Cocinaron y revolvieron estos ingredientes por horas y horas hasta que lograron una mezcla tan cremosa y tan espesa que hasta las moscas se empalagaron.

Cuando Olivia volvió de pasear con su novio se encontró con su madre y su abuela tiradas en el piso de la cocina, de la misma forma en que su padre las había encontrado a ella y a su madre el día de su nacimiento. Olivia nunca supo en qué consistió el tónico porque Ernestina y Rosa se habían comido todo lo que habían preparado sin dejar ningún rastro que pudiera seducir a Olivia. De esta forma Olivia logró casarse y formar su propia familia.

Después de diez años, Olivia tuvo que levantar los restos de su madre y de su abuela, ya que se les había vencido el alquiler de los nichos del cementerio. Excavó un buen rato y encontró a los cuerpos, que ya estaban tan desintegrados por la potencia del tónico que hasta los dientes se habían esfumado. Con los cucharones más grandes de su

cocina, Olivia juntó todas las cenizas para llevárselas a su casa. Los sepultureros estaban muy intrigados por el olor tan fuerte a frutillas y a vino blanco que despedían estos restos, entonces Olivia no tuvo más remedio que darles unas bolsitas perfumadas de ceniza para que las usaran como incienso. Todo el camino, desde el cementerio hasta su casa, Olivia tuvo que regalarle a todo aquel que pasase un puñadito de las cenizas de su madre y de su abuela, era tal la pasión que sentían por este olor que algunas personas se quejaron a las autoridades porque creían que estas cenizas poseían cualidades afrodisíacas. De esta forma, Olivia logró perfumar a todo el vecindario sin realmente saber por qué. Ella sabía la debilidad que Rosa y Ernestina tenían por las frutillas, por eso ella creyó que así debían de oler sus restos. Este olor aún se siente en el pueblo, especialmente en la casa de Olivia, quien vive con su marido y sus tres hijos varones.

MARÍA CISTERNA

THE STORY OF SOME WOMEN WHO GORGED THEMSELVES AND SO LOST THEIR HUSBANDS

Rosa had managed to escape Italy with her fiancee; they traveled to Argentina to begin a new life together. Neither of them had money, and they had to live in a lodging house near the port until they could buy their own home. Her husband worked all day and sometimes didn't even return at night. After a while Rosa realized that she would never become pregnant if her husband was never at home. And the times when he did come home, and she would be waiting for him in the rose colored nightgown which she had embroidered, he fell asleep so quickly that Rosa never had the chance to slide off the garment they way she had practiced as a child.

Finally one night, fed up with so much waiting, she went to the kitchen and searched for the biggest pot that she could find. She set about to prepare a tonic that would take away her loneliness. This feeling of loneliness was familiar to her because she had dreamed of it the night of her first period. She would only use her favorite things in the tonic: ten kilos of chocolate from Bariloche, five kilos of strawberries, three spoonfuls of caramel, and half a bottle of white wine. When she had finished she began to eat with gusto, spoonful after spoonful, until she reached the bottom of the pot, until, at the end, she was so stuffed she couldn't stop retching for hours. In spite of her upset stomach, Rosa felt herself so satisfied, so relaxed and so sated that she remained there, stretched out on the kitchen floor, until her husband found her, semiconscious, one week later.

When Rosa's husband realized that she was pregnant, he became very indignant not to have participated in the creation of his own offspring, and he decided to leave, because, he realized, he would never be able to live with a woman who didn't even need him for purposes of procreation. He never believed Rosa's story about the tonic, and Rosa didn't try very hard to convince him of it. Luckily, Rosa had twins, and so wouldn't have to take the tonic again, which, although it was incredibly delicious, had left her for a while almost hypnotized, to the point that all the women of the neighborhood imagined she'd gone crazy, as she would, now and then, leave the house without her bra or shoes.

Rosa and the twins lived together modestly for many years. Rosa worked in the house washing clothes for rich families, Ernestina baked cakes for the neighborhood bakeries, and Betty worked as a secretary for a foreign business which, after some years, sent her to work in the United States. Rosa and Ernestina then lived together alone, although the neighborhood always imagined that there were more people living with them, because of the racket they made. As they supported themselves through cooking and washing, they were almost always in the house and only went out in the mornings to buy essentials. In the afternoons, right after the siesta, the two of them would start singing at the top of their lungs. They would invent songs on the spur of the moment from the names of the ingredients Ernestina used in her cakes. Their neighbors understood this oddness as a result of the disgrace in which the women lived, as a result of the lack of men around the house, and therefore nobody really bothered themselves about it. Besides, the cakes that Ernestina made were so good and so creatively made that it was worth it to have to listen to their inharmonious voices.

One day Ernestina was buying eggs for the day's cakes when she saw in the market a man with the most handsome and serene face that she had ever seen. She didn't realize at first that he was blind. She simply thought he was a little slow, that he needed more time than other people to observe the world, and the things in it. It was owing to this very slowness that Ernestina married him. Her mother had told her of certain peculiarities of men but she figured that, as he was blind, the rest of his senses would be very developed, an indispensable asset in the business of making cakes.

Rosa had never told Ernestina the story of how she had come into the world, nor did she truly know what effect the tonic might have on the lives of her daughters and grandchildren. Soon after the marriage Ernestina became pregnant and had quickly grown so large that her husband had to sleep on the couch to make room for her. One night Ernestina got out of bed without waking up. She sleepwalked straight to the kitchen. She took down a pot and added to it strawberries, chocolate, and the rest of the ingredients of her mother's tonic, and drank it down. The tonic was so delicious that the baby inside of her sensed the pleasure Ernestina was experiencing and decided to come out into the world just then solely to have a taste of the sweet, thick stuff. Ernestina's husband, awoken by the noises coming from the kitchen, sensed that mother and newly born daughter were eating from the pot, and was intrigued; he grabbed a spoon and began to eat as well. Five seconds hadn't passed before he started to vomit forcefully and cry out about the great stomach pain he was suffering. So it happened that the tonic killed the poor man, leaving the two women alone, spread out on the floor, and covered with so

much chocolate that it was difficult to make out where mother ended and daughter began. When Rosa found out what had happened, she understood the effect of her tonic, so marvellous, in its way, though it always left them without husbands. Ernestina had time to grieve for her husband for one day only, as her baby was very small and required lots of attention.

After the death of Ernestina's husband, the whole neighborhood became very suspicious of this family that didn't seem to be able to hold on to its husbands. They didn't understand why these men were disappearing. What was truly scandalous was that no one had seen either Ernestina or Rosa while they were with child; this incited a great amount of suspicion among the women of the barrio, who believed that the two of them had done something to get rid of these decent men. To make matters worse, the only black clothing that the two of them had left was from their youth, when they had been obliged on occasion to attend the burial of someone they knew. After they drank the tonic, the clothing didn't fit anymore because they had grown so fat that they had to sacrifice the curtains of the house in order to dress themselves.

Olivia, Ernestina's daughter, grew up to be a woman so beautiful that there were few men who could look at her without falling in love. Her mother and grandmother, tired and bored at not having a man around the house, did everything in their power so that Olivia could get married and have a family that would last her more than a week. Unfortunately, however, the whole neighborhood knew the future that awaited the young man who married any of these women. Therefore, although every young man in the neighborhood vicinity was in love with Olivia, not one of them ever dared take the risk of asking for her hand. After much trying, mother and grandmother finally found her a candidate, a young man from far away who knew nothing of the history of the family. Without stopping to think, he accepted the offer of marriage.

Although Ernestina and Rosa ardently wished it that Olivia should get married, they were somewhat afraid as well, in that they feared Olivia might somehow divine the formula of the tonic and end up killing her husband. It was then that they decided to gorge themselves on the tonic, using every crate of strawberries, all the chocolate, the last jar of caramel, and all the bottles of white wine that there were in the neighborhood. Cooking and stirring the ingredients for hours and hours, they finally achieved a mixture so creamy and rich that even the mosquitos had soon had enough.

When Olivia returned home from a walk with her fiancee, she found her mother and grandmother spread out on the floor of the kitchen, in the same way she had been found with her mother the day of her birth. Olivia never found out what the tonic was made of

because Ernestina and Rosa had eaten everything, leaving not even the slightest trace that could tempt Olivia. In this way Olivia was able to marry and start her own family.

About ten years later, Olivia had to move the remains of her mother and grandmother, as the lease on their cemetery plots had come to an end. She dug a good while until she found the bodies, which were so disintegrated by the potency of the tonic that even the teeth had long ago turned to dust. With the largest spoons from her kitchen, Olivia gathered together all the ashes in order to bring them to the house. The gravediggers seemed very interested in the smell of strawberries and white wine that emanated from the remains, and Olivia had no other option but to give them each a small, sweet smelling bag of ashes to use as incense.

The whole way, from the cemetery to her house, Olivia had to give to everyone she passed a handful of the ashes of her mother and grandmother. The excitement that the ashes caused in the neighborhood was such that some people felt moved to complain to the authorities, because they believed the ashes had aphrodisiac properties. In this way, Olivia managed to perfume the entire neighborhood, though she couldn't understand why the ashes smelled so strongly. She remembered the weakness Rosa and Ernestina had had for strawberries, and she imagined that it was for that reason the ashes smelled the way they did, though she couldn't be sure. One can still detect this smell in the neighborhood, especially in Olivia's house, where she lives with her husband and three lively sons.

—Translated by IAN GOLD
with the author

NANCY CLOUGHERTY

The Snowy Streets at Night

I wanted to go out
in tonight's snow storm
and take pictures
to send to you
in California.
But I have
no film.
Do you remember
that first winter?
We went out nights
in the snow and
I took pictures
that never did come out.
I'd like to send
one of those to you—
the back of you
walking up the hill
under the amber
streetlights.
Even then
I could only take
pictures of you
walking
away from me.

Visceral

For awhile there was doubt.
That maybe,
if you opened my mouth
and yelled down my throat
you would hear an echo.

But now you cannot stop
the flow of my
guts as they pour out
all over you.
And you beg me to stop
because these insides
have nothing
to do with you,
it is not your
fault. But neither
of us can keep it
down.

MATTHEW COLANTONIO

Sizzle

(a dream narrative)

There we were,
my father and I,
in that big colonial that
we never lived in:
four bedrooms, three baths,
and a two-car garage
with no cars, just stoves
and there's a stove in
every room, which is great
because me and my dad
want to split a steak.
I get the cayenne pepper, garlic salt,
and Worcestershire sauce.
The meat hits the pan
on the stove in the study,
and we wait, like hunting dogs,
for that first succulent sizzle,
but there isn't one.
I crouch to see the blue flame
attacking the bottom of the pan,
but the meat will not cook—
it refuses.
Hey, no big dilemma right?
There's a stove in every room,
but just like the study,
every stove throws
an impotent heat
and the steak remains cold,
drowning in sauce,
choking on spices.
The last room we try
is the kitchen, whose stove is
seldom used and
it finally sizzles.

Throwing Instructions

"I don't want to die in New England,"

she says. The snake,
a whispering string of cigarette smoke and coffee steam,
dances, as if it knows something she doesn't,
around her face.

"I know I was born to be bare-foot and in the sun all the time."

Like gadgets, her eyes drift
towards objects in the room
that aren't there.

"If you bought me a shack in Key West, just a simple shack you know, with a little stove, a double bed with a quilt, and a coffee maker, I would be quite content to die there. And when I do finally die, no coffin, no tombstone, and no gaudy urn in some weird place around the house. I want my ashes thrown into the ocean. All you'll need is what you know. You'd better not dress me up to get burned either—a plain, fairly flammable nightgown will do just fine."

ALLAN COLE

For now

Snowflakes, big and spinning fell into her eyes, and my hair, and
    the lights of shops.
    They were pushed aside, by our embarrassed boots,
she knew how she felt and I did not,
                she knew that was it for reality,
    experience has a way of doing that.

But I was, surprising enough to all,
the one with the wisdom,
    watching the Christmas cat in the hat,
    and the fire trucks,
and all the kids that we would never have.

We thought that, in another time and place, but I was,
    and this wasn't.

Jersey Smile

It rained on my new shoes
when we parked
and no one turned to look at you
when we walked in,
the standards must be
vastly different,
but outside the wind lashed
every bar in America.

Shoreline cars and parking spots
and the peak of the blow,
his friend,
an unexpected gem, a reminder, a certainty that I wanted,
while you and your old first choice would not look at me.

I went away in an intense look
like we all wished I would.

JACKIE CORNOG

Sleep

I want to sleep like the beach sleeps
lulling itself in waving breath
quiet as the deep deep blue black
sky when the last dot of sunset
has blipped out of view.

I want to sleep like the trees sleep
after stretching bent brown arms
towards the light, tossing off
their last stoke of brilliance,
leaving color dreams on the ground.

I want to sleep like a day sleeps
silent wrapped in soft cotton,
steam rising from hot mint tea,
cats arching their backs and yawning,
words slipping off a page.

GREGORY M. ELAM

i was, not was i

—i was washing the dishes—i was taking a shower—i was lifting a Fender amplifier—i was cleaning out my desk drawers—i was sleeping—i was reading about Lenny Bruce—i was cutting my toenails—i was eating tortellini with pesto—i was sewing a patch on an army jacket—i was taping Bob Dylan unplugged—i was buying turnips on sale—i was tying a slip knot—i was toying with epitaphs—i was stretching—i was walking—i was dieting—i was urinating—i was hanging a picture—i was watering a plant—i was learning how to juggle—i was counting my money—i was opening a letter—i was blasting the stereo—i was smoking a joint—i was paying a bill—i was getting an intimate massage—i was changing a battery—i was browsing for tombstones—i was checking the temperature—i was pulling on my fingers—i was searching the want ads for ms. right—i was writing a letter to N.Y.C.—i was doing the laundry—i was practicing the cello runs of Von Biber—i was balancing my checkbook—i was talking on the telephone to a travel agency in Phoenix—i was sitting by the window on a cumulonimbus morning—i was singing a Lefty Frizzel song—i was recycling empty bottles—i was swallowing aspirin—i was writing in dactyllic hexameter—i was back beneath the covers—i was dreaming about Joyce Kulhawik and Suzanne Bates as lesbians—i was sipping hot red clover and dandelion root tea—i was watching Myrna Loy and William Powell on my 19 inch black & white Zenith tv set—i was doodling faces in dark watercolors—i was waiting for the phone to ring—i was mixing a cocktail—i was pouring Drano down the tub—i was updating my résumé—i was intonating my stratocaster—i was selling my flea market records—i was changing the strings on my banjo—i was trying on boots at Walker's on Boylston St.—i was adjusting the lighting in the hallway—i was demagnetizing tape heads—i was considering attending a funeral of someone i didn't know—i was pacing the floor above the landfill—i was alive in the late twentieth century—i was disappearing in miscommunication quicksand—i was hoping to do for others—i was—

ANDREW GEBAUER

WHAT I NEED

Rory wakes, shivering. She lifts her head from the pillow into the sharp cold of the bedroom and listens for the baby. Beside her, Bill's form is solid, motionless beneath the covers, the comforter pulled tight over his shoulder. The room smells like the night outside, like rain and wet leaves. She shivers, feeling the skin on her forearms tighten into goosebumps. A twinge of nausea turns in her stomach.

A car pushes past outside, the wind gusting in its wake. A breath of cold air presses against her cheek, and she drops her head to the pillow again. It must be below forty. The window has fallen again, the latch broken. She turns on her side and slips a hand beneath Bill. He shifts to the side of the bed. Rory pulls the hand back and shuts her eyes, drawing her knees up to her chest. She listens to the noise the wind makes as the open window snags a piece of it.

Bill throws back the covers. Jesus, it's freezing in here, he says. He goes to the window. I just fixed this. He slams the upper half of the window shut, the springs shuddering in the frame.

Don't slam it so hard. The baby. Rory lifts her head, listens, and a cry drops into the cold from Nicolas' room. She waits. It is followed by another, louder. God, Bill, you do this every night.

She sits up, bleary-eyed, and hugs herself, the cold shivering down her back. She holds her forehead, tries to drag herself from sleep, eyes stinging. Bill stands at the window, filling most of it, the light from the street blocked out by his frame. She looks at the Wall Street apron, jeans, and shirt lying in a heap at the foot of the bed, dropped there, she supposes, when he came in from the bar. They stink of grease and cigarettes and beer, and Rory kicks them to the floor from under the blankets. She hunches forward, folding her arms tightly across her stomach. Nicolas cries in the room across the kitchen.

Go to sleep Nicolas, she groans.

What I need is some duct tape to hold the latch on. Bill takes a ruler from the floor and jams it edgewise between the two window halves. He steps back, and the upper half slides open, the ruler clattering to the sill. Damnit! He slams the window shut again. Stay there!

Rory slips beneath the covers. Why don't you just fix it? She pushes her face into the pillow, into the comfortable smell of her hair, her nightcream, but Nicolas cries hard now, and the bed is cold.

Bill jams the ruler between the window halves again. He hammers at the ruler with his fist. Are you going to get him or do you want me? I'll do it. He looks at her.

No, don't. Rory slips bare legs out from under the covers. The cold leaps onto her skin.

What's that supposed to mean?

Taking his robe from the floor, she puts it on, her slight frame lost in the folds of cloth. Nothing. She pulls the belt tight around her waist. I'm tired, Bill. I'll get him.

In the kitchen, the refrigerator knocks and hums in the corner, the linoleum icy on her bare feet. Rory pulls the robe close around her neck and hurries across the floor.

It is warmer in Nicolas' room. She leaves the light off. The glow-worm nightlight from her mother flickers weakly against the carpet by the door, its small yellowed arc outshined by the streetlight outside the window, the halogen gleam harsh and unnatural, spilling onto the changing table and from there to the floor. The dolphin mobile drifts above the crib. Rory steps across the carpet and leans into the crib. Talcum powder, excrement, and sour milk stick in the back of her throat. She lifts Nicolas to her, cradling his head. Come on, kid.

His chin is shiny with saliva, eyes squeezed shut above puffy cheeks, tearless. She smoothes his hair and touches her lips to the small forehead. Then presses her palm to his cheek.

Laying him on the changing table, she pulls at the tape securing the diaper. Her fingers are clumsy with cold and sleep. She watches Nicolas' reflection in the window, her hands automatic below her own pale face, picking at, stripping away the tape from the other hip. She thinks that she could fall asleep right here, changing the baby, watching their reflections fade and blur in the window, his transparent, hers just a flicker beyond it. In the bedroom, the window slams shut. Beneath her hands, the little body tenses, and she cringes at the scream. God, Nicolas, don't do that.

She hears Bill fill a glass in the kitchen. Nicolas squirms beneath her, and Rory blinks her eyes and shakes her head. Bill flips the lightswitch and Nicolas' eyes screw shut in the brightness.

I fixed it. I'll just leave the ruler in until I can get some more glue.

Rory slips a hand beneath Nicolas' back, his skin hot on her palm, and pulls the diaper out from under him.

I think he's sick. His whole body's hot. She looks down at him. His face is crinkled, tiny bubbles of saliva at the corners of his open mouth.

You know, that wood glue Manny gave me doesn't work for shit. Doesn't hold. What I need is epoxy.

Did you feed him when you came home?

That stuff'll hold anything. Or I could nail it. Do we have a hammer?

Maybe it's because he's been crying.

Bill walks over to stand beside her. He holds a finger out for Nicolas to grab. Hey kid. Then to Rory. He's got the diaper.

Rory looks down and moves the dirty diaper from Nicolas' reach. Did you call Fisher today?

Nicolas' little fingers wrap around Bill's. What?

Fisher. She takes the dirty diaper and folds it in half.

Oh. No, I didn't get a chance to.

She says nothing, folds the diaper into a tight little bag and tapes it shut.

I'm looking, Rory.

He watches her open the hamper and drop the diaper in and then he goes to the crib and flicks one of the plastic dolphins, watching the piece spin into the others.

What about Cole's? Nicolas waves his fat arms, reaching for Rory.

Ah, that place is a dump. Anyway, I was talking to this guy at Wall Street tonight who works for this agency for a record company. He supplies bodyguards for bands. He said he could get me a job doing that, said all you have to do is be big. I'm—

Bill—

What? I just talked to the guy tonight!

Rory pulls a babywipe from the dispenser and wipes at Nicolas' bottom. This! These jobs! No one's going to hire you to be a bodyguard, Bill. We have this conversation all the time. It's always the same with these stupid jobs. Nothing ever comes of any of them.

Well, Jesus, Rory, I'm looking. I can't help it if I don't get the job. At least I'm looking.

It's not the same, Bill. The jobs you look for—

What?

She says nothing, steps on the pedal for the trashcan beneath the changing table and drops the babywipe in. The health center called today about Nicolas' three-month exam. What am I supposed to tell her? What if he's sick?

I don't know, Ror. What do you want me to do? I'm looking.

I don't think you are. Not really. She takes another babywipe from the dispenser and finishes cleaning Nicolas.

Hey—fuck it. Bill walks back to the doorway. She drops the second babywipe into the canister, letting the lid bang back into

place, and takes a bottle of talcum powder from the baby bag on the floor. She looks over her shoulder at his back disappearing into the kitchen, feels the tightness behind her eyes and in her throat.

God, you don't give a shit, do you? Goddamnit, Bill— Her voice breaks, and the tears spring hot in her eyes. Nicolas squalls behind her and she gropes for him where he is suddenly gone from her grasp. Turning, she sees a cloud of talcum powder spill onto the baby from the upturned bottle in her hand.

Oh shit! She dabs at Nicolas' cheeks, around his eyes, trying to push the silky stuff away with her fingertips. He wails, and she takes him from the table, trying to gather his screams and kicks into her arms. The talcum powder is in her eyes, her mouth, her nose, and she sneezes, blinking her eyes shut against the scratching.

Here—give him to me. Bill is beside her, taking Nicolas from her. The baby screams louder.

In the bathroom, Rory wets a washcloth, the water running streaks through the powdery film on the backs of her hands. She wrings the cloth out and dabs a corner of it beneath the baby's eye. The blood pounds in her head and the room spins. She bends closer over Nicolas. Bill's hands are splotched and grimy against the baby's white skin, rings of black beneath his torn fingernails. She rubs the cloth over Nicolas' face, his arms and legs, his chest, rinsing and re-rinsing the cloth in the sink. Most of the powder gone, she takes him from Bill and goes back into the baby's room, where she lays him naked and sprawling on the changing table.

Slowing, a wave of exhaustion drops over her. The muscles in her thighs, arms, and shoulders weigh on her. She leans against the table. Bill stands in the doorway.

Go back to bed, she says. I'm just going to change him and put him down.

He stands there in the doorway for a moment and then she hears him go back across the kitchen and into the bedroom. Outside, it is raining hard now. Rory presses her eyes shut, the talcum powder pasty in her mouth. She fits the diaper beneath Nicolas. Numb fingers pinch the plastic together at his hip too firmly and he cries out. The other side fastened, she lifts him from the table to her shoulder and walks across the room, stroking the back of his head, his fine silky hair against her cheek, her eyes closed, until the whimpers cease and, pressing her lips to his forehead, she lays him in the crib.

In the bedroom, Rory drops Bill's bathrobe to the floor and crawls into bed beside him. He is awake, lying on his back.

Don't, Bill. She says it into the pillow.

Don't what? Who said anything?

You were about to. Just don't. I just want to go to sleep. She turns over, facing the side of the bed, and pulls the comforter over her shoulder.

I was just going to say—they hired this friend of Manny's at the bar, so I can't get more hours. Nothing I can do about it. He rolls over, his back to her, and they lie in silence. We'll have enough—between you and me.

He tugs at the comforter and then slides a hand over her hip. We're doing OK now, with just us. If that guy comes back to the bar, I'm going to ask him about that bodyguard thing. I could do that.

Rory stares into the darkness beside the bed, listening to the rain, steady out in the cold. When Bill's breathing is deep and regular, she rolls onto her back and stares at the ceiling. Tomorrow is Tuesday; toilet paper day she and Bill call it. On Tuesdays, while Liz Channing is at her chiropractor appointment, Rory slips into the supply closet and tumbles two or three rolls into her knapsack.

I can't believe I'm still doing this. She whispers it to the ceiling.

The sobs cut into the darkness, harsh, choking gasps that tear through the dark rooms of the apartment. Rory wakes, or begins to, trying to open her eyes, to rise to the surface even as she slips back beneath. She pulls the covers over her ear, the shrill cries shearing across her skin.

She sits up, breathing in, eyes closed as she tries to gather herself. Sleet rattles quick and sharp against the window pane. Her head is shivery and raw. Nausea squirms in the pit of her stomach and she slips from the bed to the floor. She huddles there, closing her eyes and shuddering as the sickness passes over her. Nicolas screams, and the pain notches tightly in her head. The scream recedes and the pressure slips back, only to be ratcheted up by the next one, these building on each other until she can't even see herself going into his room. She groans his name.

She pushes herself up, holding the bedpost. Thinking nothing, she stumbles to the door. It is loud in the kitchen, Nicolas' crying flat and harsh against the bare walls. The refrigerator whirs in the darkness. In Nicolas' room, the streetlight glares across the carpet. The baby screams in a dark corner. Rory steps across the carpet toward the crib and pitches forward, her foot tangled in the handle of the baby bag. The corner of the changing table cracks into her forehead, and a searing white light explodes behind her eyes. She gasps and falls to the floor, lies there unmoving, curled against the pain that erupts in her head. Then, feeling along the carpet to a leg of the crib, she pulls herself up by the bars. She leans over the railing, clutching

her forehead, and Nicolas screams up at her. A single, heaving sob retches from her throat, and she pulls the screeching, hysterical mass out of the darkness.

He screams, the sound insane, and the pain flares in her head, flushing through her body. She clutches him, hands pressing his back to her. She bows her head over him, sobbing, and he wails beneath her chin, unknowing, mindless. Nicolas, she sobs, stop it, and grips the small body to her own, harder. But he screams louder, closer, and she can no longer tell where one wail begins and the last cuts short. The pain in her head flares impossibly, lashing out in raw bolts, and flashes of white close over her eyes. She wraps herself around him, pulling his head into her breast, his squalls rising in pitch now to an animal intensity. She shuts her eyes and chokes his name, squeezing him to her, repeating his name through her sobs.

And the wailing stops, or becomes a different sound. Less strident. Guttural. Rory rocks her body back and forth, her head down, pressed to the top of Nicolas' head. Shhhh. She holds him to her, hard. She hangs on to him, her own sobs absorbing his, violent shudders between them.

Then he is beside her, turning her to face him, his grip painful on her wrists, prying her arms from the baby. She cries out and struggles to hold Nicolas and for a moment, the three of them are locked there in the darkness. His fingers dig into her skin and she braces against him. His voice comes frightened, breaking. Jesus, Rory—

Her hands come away and Nicolas slips from between the two of them. The pressure of his body gone from her chest, she hangs horribly in the darkness there, and it feels like her stomach has been hollowed out. She is staring, eyes wide, at her hands, held shaking before her, pale in the light from the window, wraithlike. She looks up at Bill. He is holding Nicolas, cradling him, his head bent over the child's, and Nicolas' gasps come harsh and ragged. The coughs are too dry, like sandpaper on stone. Rory's hand flutters to her neck and pulls at the skin there.

Bill walks with Nicolas to the door and turns on the light. Rory blinks, the room over-bright and strange around her. She hears the sleet again, cracking and ticking against the window, and shivers, holding her elbows and looking at the floor and then up at Bill, her eyes wet, thin lips quivering. I'm so tired—

He looks at her, his face strange, features unnatural in the bright light. Rory flattens her palms over her belly and backs away from the crib to the window. The tears are wet on her face. Her forehead throbs dully and she wonders that she feels no pain.

Nicolas won't stop coughing. Bill holds him upright, but the coughing continues. What do I do here, Rory? His voice is frightened.

Give him to me. She almost yells it at him and runs across the room, arms outstretched. Give him to me.

He stares at her and holds Nicolas to his chest.

It's OK. I'm all right now. I'm —Rory begins to cry again, holding her hands out. She reaches, and Bill lets Nicolas into her arms. She holds him lightly, barely, his reddened face a blur through her tears.

Should we—

No. She folds her head to Nicolas'.

We have to. Listen to him.

But the coughing has ceased and Nicolas only cries softly into Rory's shoulder. No. He's all right. He's stopped. Listen to him. He's all right.

A gust of wind scatters ice across the window pane. Rory rocks back and forth with the baby, stroking his back. Bill stands in the doorway, watching her. She walks across the floor, murmuring to Nicolas, smoothing his hair. Her head feels light, unweighed, and she is no longer even tired. Soon Nicolas is quiet and she goes to the corner of the room and lays him in the crib, spreading the sheet and blanket beneath him. She hunches her shoulders and tucks her hands under her arms. They stand there, he in the doorway, she at the crib, for a long time.

Then he clears his throat. Let's go to bed, hon.

Rory looks at him where he leans in the doorway, his face tired and puffy, fists stuffed in the pockets of his robe.

No. I'd better stay with him for a while. You go.

He looks at her, his face unsure.

I'll be all right, she says. Just turn the light off.

He hesitates, then passes his hand over the lightswitch. Come soon, he says, and then is gone into the kitchen.

Rory stands above the crib in shadow, listening to Nicolas' faint, fitful intakes of breath. She smoothes her shaking hands across the front of her nightgown, bringing them to rest, palms flat, on her belly. It is cold in the room again. A draft pushes across the floor and up her nightgown, chilling her legs. She closes her eyes, feeling the wetness in her lashes. Her knees go slack and she leans against the crib, digging her fingers into the soft skin of her belly.

MATTHEW GILLESPIE

Tired

Tonight
I wished
I was a piece of fruit
Rotting
On a table

JULIET C. GLAUBER

Communication

you once said
I only appreciated you
physically
I could see how you might think that
But you are wrong
Only
I can express myself physically
In ways I can't emotionally
I can plead
I can cry
I can scream
I can moan
I can cling to you
I can clasp you as tight as I want
Physically
Otherwise, you might think me strange
If I took off your shoes
And bent down to kiss your toes
If I licked the soles of your feet
If I told you how much I loved you
If I whined it
If I screeched it
If I begged you
To love me as long
And as hard as you can
If I told you this
I would scare you
But in bed
They are perfect manners

Killing Time

He leaves and I am briefly happy
I do the things I need to do
I look for more
do those
and wait
Pressing my face against the window
leaving nose marks in the steam I breathe
cursing my patience
Until his key turns in the door
And I run to pretend
I've been doing something

JULIET C. GLAUBER

EMIL & GUSTI

Emil is telling me stories about his childhood. He tells me about the first man in their small town to get a car. The rich Baron had to drive for hours, because although he could drive, he could not stop, and so had to wait for the gas to run out. He finishes that story and goes onto the next.

"When we were young," he booms in heavily accented English. "When we were young boys, me Walter, Richard, Karl and Fredl."

He rattles off the names of his four brothers, ending with my grandfather's. Emil is the oldest of five boys. The war took some, time took the others, and now Emil is the only one left.

"When we were young boys, me Walter, Richard, Karl and Fredl, we would climb to the roof of the barn." They were the sons of a cattle farmer. It is hard to imagine Emil as a farmer, but then again it is hard to imagine him as a boy. Despite his large frame, his hands are gentle. They are soft and pale, and they stroke my hair as I sit by his feet. I close my eyes, his light touch and the warm room making me drowsy.

I hear Gusti laugh from across the room.

"Look at my little cuddle-child. She curls like a cat at his feet." I open my eyes a crack and smile at her to show her I heard. She blows me a kiss. I close my eyes again. Emil plays with my hair as if it were a foreign object. He lifts it, testing its weight in his hands, and let's it slowly flow through his fingers before lifting it again.

"When we were young boys, me, Walter, Richard, Karl and Fredl, we would climb to the roof of the barn. The manure pile was half as high as the roof. We would jump in the air, and hope our mother didn't see us."

I sit up, having been awakened from my near-slumber by his semi-leap that illustrated the jump from the barn into the pile of shit below. He rests his hand on top of my head, not playing with my hair, but in a reassuring gesture, and I smile up for him, hoping my love for him shows through, that he understands. He never says things like "I love you," so I have to make my expressions non-verbal as well.

"When I first went to work in U.S." We are now in the post-war stories. He never talks about the war itself, except in the most general terms. He sits back in the worn gray chair, and I rest an elbow on its arm.

I like to sit by Emil's feet. As an adult, I am simply too big to sit on a ninety-eight year old man's lap. I wish I could, because when I was young, nothing could hurt me there. When I was a child, I thought he was the biggest man in the world, and would curl up on his lap. I miss the feeling of complete security that gave me. Sitting by his feet is the closest I can come to that now.

"When I first went to work in U.S., I dress like we did in Europe, in a suit and a tie." He straightens his neck tie to prove his point.

"When I first went to work in U.S., I dress like we did in Europe, in a suit and a tie. I wore it my first day in the sewers." He laughs at the memory, but I don't. I can picture him, very quiet and oh-so-noble, the way he always is, working in the sewers that first day in a suit and tie.

He is a tall man. He does everything with dignity. He was an engineer in Europe. How did he feel, working in the sewers?

Gusti calls to me now, and I go and sit by her on the blue couch. I sink into the soft cushions, and let her body cradle mine. She puts her arm around me, and rubs her hand up and down my arm, as if to ward off some imaginary chill. She smiles at me, and I decide that no one in the world knows how to smile except for her. Her smile doesn't stay on her lips, it extends to her eyes, and her whole face brightens. She is old too, in her late eighties, and her face is lined with wrinkles, as a face is apt to be at that age. Yet when she smiles, her wrinkles disappear, and it is clear that smiling is the way her face normally is. I wonder, not for the first time, how someone who has lived her life can have so many smiles in her. She lost everything, her family, her friends, everyone. How did she recover? How did she forget?

I hug her best I can. She is so small, the perfect contrast to Emil, him so calm, her so bubbly. I hug her as best as I can, but it still feels incomplete. I don't want to just have her arms around me, I want to take her smile, her unconditional love, and draw it inside of me, to have it with me always. Is it selfish to want all of her love to myself?

She is soon up and gone. She never stays in one spot for long. I go back to Emil. He is reading the obituaries in the New York Times. I glance at the one he is reading. It is the obituary of a woman who spoke on Nazi radio, trying to break the spirits of the Allied soldiers by telling them their wives and girlfriends were cheating on them.

I don't finish the article. I squeeze his arm as I walk by him, on my way to find out where my little sister is. He keeps looking at the obituary long after he has read it. I wonder what he is feeling. Does he hate that woman? Does he hate all of the Nazis and all of the people who helped them? I do, but I have never heard him say a bad word about anybody. It isn't possible that he could not hate her, is it?

"Bitch," he says, his deep voice oddly quiet, and he folds the paper.

GAIL MONAHAN

HITOMI MINAMI

HIV+HIV-HIV+HIV-HIV+HIV-HIV+HIV-HIV+HIV-
ESTIMATED BY 2000 THREE MILLION AMERICANS WILL HAVE CONTRACTED THE AIDS VIRUS.
HIV-HIV+HIV-HIV+HIV-HIV+HIV-HIV+HIV-HIV+

TOM GREALY

JENNY McCRACKEN

NANCY CLOUGHERTY

KATHLEEN J. WELLS

LISA GIACALONE

MASANORI FUKUDA

MARC D. GOLDFINGER

I LOVE NO ONE BUT YOU

I love no one but you,
Darling don't say we're through
I can't sleep at night
I dream with all of my might
that you'll come into my heart
and we'll never part.
—The Jesters, 1957.

We would sit and have coffee and smoke cigarettes after shooting the heroin and she told me tales about what it was like when she was a child. About the time that her father picked her up by her hair and slammed her into the refrigerator because she dropped a dish.

I was mesmerized by the story of her father chasing her across the pasture with the pitchfork because she was afraid to ride the new horse. She showed me the scars on her butt when she told me the story. Her mother was the same size as her. When I met her mother she smiled at me and shook my hand. Just like her daughter her eyes always looked sad.

Star was what everyone called her. Her real name was Anastasia. She loved her mother very much. Tears would fill her eyes as she talked about the times her father would beat her mother. I'm not sure if my parents ever really loved each other but my father would never hit my mother. Never.

* * *

I had just returned from California. One year on parole. It went pretty fast now that I think of it. I worked most of the time in a group home for autistic teenagers. Sometimes they would get violent. I was pretty good with them when things got rough. The other counselors liked working with me because I was real effective when a client went off. One, two, three, and they would go down.

Anyhow, I got back to New Hampshire and had been there only a few days. Right away I started working at an Inn as a chef. It was a live-in situation.

Next door to the Inn was a low-income apartment building. I knew some of the people there and when I passed the building some of my old acquaintances were drinking beer out on the front steps. I wasn't going to go over to see them.

Then I saw her. Her hair was reddish brown and was full like a lion's mane. I could see her eyes from the street. They were like giant dark haunted holes in her face and they pulled me right across the lawn of the building. I was talking to my old buddies but I couldn't get my eyes off her.

"Hey, I'm Levy," I said and held my hand out to shake hers.

"Star," was all she said as she gripped my hand.

Her hand was dwarfed in mine but she had the strong shake of a working man. We talked for a while. When I mentioned prison her eyes got real big. I don't know. I never saw eyes that big in my life before. When I was younger there was a set of paintings that were popular and all the people and animals in them were all eyes that you could fall into. Maybe God saw those pictures and made Star.

* * *

At first she wouldn't go out with me. Everytime I saw her I would ask her out. She would always have some excuse. She was staying with the people I knew in that building. I noticed that she slept in her car sometimes. She asked me for money twice. I said no. I figured that if she wouldn't go out with me why should I let her use me for the money.

Finally one night she was hanging out on the front steps and she asked me if I had five dollars.

"No, but I have a tab at the bar in the inn," was what I said. "Do you want to have a few drinks with me?"

She thought for a long minute.

"Yes," she said. "I guess I could use a drink."

I don't think she wanted particularly to drink with me. She just wanted to drink. That was okay by me. I didn't particularly want to drink. I just wanted to be with her.

We closed the bar and went back to my room. She never left.

* * *

A lot of things happened over the next four years. We got married. We moved into the city and were working two jobs.

At one job we were mental health workers in a hospital. I worked the acute admissions ward. She worked with the chronics. We worked the graveyard shift and after getting out of work we went to a horse farm and grained and watered the horses and walked them. Star would groom the horses. She grew up on a horse farm and could even break horses. She used to talk about it all the time. After work we would go to a bar and drink til about noon. Then we would go home and sleep.

We would argue sometimes. I had started shooting heroin again and soon I would leave her at the bar while I went off with some people to get the stuff. When I came back she would have some guy or another hanging around her. Sometimes I would fight with them.

One time there was this guy who started giving me a hard time when I told him to keep away from her and we started to fight. I wasn't doing too well. The punches made noise in my ears and I could feel the vibrations. They were coming at me one after another and I was waiting for an opening so I could take the mother-fucker down. I don't know how many times he hit me but I knew if I couldn't start hitting soon that I would be in trouble.

That was when I heard the crack and the glass breaking. Suddenly I wasn't being hit anymore and it took a couple of seconds for my eyes to focus.

He was on the floor and blood was pouring from his head. Star was standing there with a broken beer bottle in her hand and her eyes were full of tears.

"I hit him. He was beating you up like my father always beat my mom. No one will ever do that to someone I love again," she said.

I looked down at the guy on the floor. He was still breathing but he didn't look too good.

"We better go," was what I said.

And we left.

I kept watching Star as we drove home. She watched the road.

"I love no one but you," I said to her.

She put her big eyes on me and smiled with her mouth.

"I know you do," she said.

She kept getting sicker and sicker from all the drinking. I had almost stopped going to the bars because I was shooting heroin every day now. I was worried about her because of the drinking, so I asked her if she wanted to try a shot. She yelled at me and told me never to let her take a shot.

I knew that the drinking was going to kill her. She was losing weight. She started missing days at work. At least the heroin was healthy. I knew the only thing bad about using junk was that you were constantly breaking the law. All the trouble I had ever had with prison and all that was just because it was against the law. Maybe one day things would change.

* * *

She was drunk and depressed when I came home with a bundle of dope. She went to sleep after she threw up and I shot two bags and nodded out. When I woke up she was opening another beer. I asked her if she wanted a shot.

"Okay. Just don't hurt me," she said.

I tied her off and gave her one-third of a bag. She smiled at me and the pupils on her giant eyes became like pin-pricks.

"Make love to me now," she said.

"Okay. I want to shoot a bag first."

"Can I have a little more?" she asked.

I was happy that she liked it and hoped that maybe she wouldn't drink so much now. I gave her another small shot and her head drooped down as her eyes shut.

I watched her for a minute to make sure that she was all right and then shot two bags because I was happy.

We made love for a couple of hours. I couldn't come because of the dope. It just felt good being skin to skin and inside each other. I never loved anyone like I loved her.

* * *

We began to make dope runs together everyday. She always wanted to come along even though she was afraid of the police. I would always go to the connection and she would wait in the truck. My friend Hector, who I was in prison with, would come with us a lot. He always had money.

Hector had a scam going with an old lady whose son he used to hang

around with. Her name was Frannie. Her son's name was Victor. Frannie always called Hector her 'other son'.

Victor always would call his mother for money when they were dope sick and when she said no he would threaten to commit suicide. She always gave in.

One day Frannie started going to Al-Anon. About a week later Victor called her up for some money and she said no. He threatened to kill himself if she didn't come up with the money. She didn't budge.

Victor had a gun and shot himself in the head while he was talking to her on the phone. After that, whenever Hector called for money, she would cry and tell him to come over. She never said no again. Over the next year she gave Hector over thirty thousand dollars. Someone told me that she died penniless in a state mental hospital.

Hector didn't have a car so we would pick him up and drive him over to get the money and he would buy us all some bags for the ride. We would go to McDonalds and shoot up in the bathroom.

Then we began seeing the police around there a lot so we started going to a bar parking lot to shoot up. We would bring a small vial of water and share the needles and the cooker. The worst part about it all would be when we had to wait for each other to get done to use the needle. I hated it when I was the last person to go.

One day the police came up on us when we were shooting up in the parking lot. We tried to make a run for it in the truck but they must have radioed ahead and cut us off on the back road. One of the cops hit Star in the middle of her back with a rifle butt and she fell down and cut her hands. She was crying and when I moved toward her the cop pushed me into the truck and held his gun to my head.

"Go ahead, you fucking asshole. Move so I can shoot you," said the cop.

I didn't move. They handcuffed us and took us to the holding tank in the police station. Bail was twenty-five dollars apiece and we were charged with possession of heroin and hypodermics. We didn't have the money. I called someone that we worked with and he came down and bailed us out.

Star didn't come with me to get the drugs again for a long time.

* * *

We were working a lot of hours at the psych hospital. There was always plenty of overtime because they were short-staffed. I would make the run into the Great Brook Valley projects or to a dope house on Charlton Street every morning before we went to work. Between the two of us we made close to a thousand a week and it was all going into our arms.

We could barely pay our rent and utilities. If it wasn't for the food at the hospital cafeteria we wouldn't eat. Star went down to 105 pounds and I was pretty slim too. Heroin was the fuel that kept us going. During breaktimes we would go into the bathroom and shoot up. A couple of times I fell out in the bathroom. I just told my co-workers that I had gotten sick.

On my floor I was a member of the treatment team. Sometimes we would refer a client to a drug program. I could always pick out the ones that had drug problems. The people I worked with always said that I had a lot of insight into that kind of thing. Then I would go into the bathroom and do some more dope.

Once in a while we couldn't get any dope before we came in to work. People would remark that I didn't seem quite normal on those days. Usually I would leave early to get some. It was hard to work like that. Star always said that "Heroin is the glue that keeps me together."

Star would have trouble falling asleep and would drink coffee until about 3 or 4 every morning on the days we wouldn't work. I could sleep early but I would wake up before it got light and watch her sleep. She looked so small and gentle and beautiful. I wanted to give her everything that her parents never gave her.

I would get up and do a bag. Then I would lay back down next to her and rest my hand on her arm while I smoked a cigarette. I watched her breathe for hours. She was the best thing that ever happened to me.

* * *

There were times that we argued over the dope. She accused me of shooting some of it before I got home and that she never got her equal half. Sometimes I would stop and shoot some right after I got out of the projects but it was the pressure of the chase that drove me to it. I always risked arrest and I felt like I was justified in taking a couple of extra bags.

Sometimes Hector would come over with his wife and we would shoot dope together. Star hated Patti. It would seem like Patti was coming

on to me sometimes. She was very pretty and I would want to sleep with her but I never did. The two women fought all the time.

Then Hector and Patti lost their place to live and were living in their car. They asked if they could stay with us and we let them stay a couple of nights but it got to be too much. They began bouncing from place to place. We lost touch with them.

The last time I saw Patti she was selling blowjobs for ten dollars on the streets of Worcester. Hector was waiting for her in the car.

I heard that Hector went back to prison and Patti just disappeared from the scene.

* * *

I took a rapid succession of arrests and was on probation with a two-year suspended sentence. Then I got dropped again and it looked like I was going to go away for sure. Star cut her wrists and they took her to a private psych hospital because through work we had good insurance.

I would come to see her and sneak dope in. Sometimes she would get a pass and we would go out and sit in a park and cuddle together. I loved her more than anything in the world.

We were talking and I told her my court date was coming up and that I might be gone soon. She cried.

"You're not going. I'll kill the judge if he sends you away," was what she told me.

What I didn't know was that she told her therapist at the hospital the same thing. Because of some kind of law they said that they were bound to call the courts and tell them. And they did.

* * *

She got out of the hospital and came with me to court. All of a sudden the state police were all about us and whisked us out of the courtroom to a small courtroom where we were the only ones there.

I was frightened and thought that I was going away for sure. I wished that I had shot some dope that morning. I kept having to run to the bathroom with the shits. Star kept crying and leaning on my shoulder and the lawyer disappeared into the back room with the judge for over two hours.

Finally he came out.

"You're very lucky," was what he told me.

He said because the prisons were very crowded and I had no history of violence that they were going to make my probation longer and execute the sentence but put a stay of execution on it as long as I didn't get into trouble again.

My probation officer told me that it was my last chance. He said he didn't care if I drank eight days a week as long as I didn't shoot any dope.

* * *

Star and I decided to clean up and stop shooting dope. After work we would go to the bar and drink to make the sickness go away. It didn't work that well at first and we puked a lot. After a while, if we drank enough, we passed out. We began missing work a lot.

We drank more than ever before. I never liked drinking that much but I would sit at the bar and pound down Jack Daniels straight up like it was water. Star and I started arguing more and more. I used to hate it when guys would come up to her in the bar and act like I wasn't there.

We went out dancing and drinking and always wound up in an argument. I felt like I was getting sicker and sicker and didn't know what to do. When Star would start drinking she would just go and go and not stop until she passed out. Sometimes I could do that but sometimes I felt like I just couldn't go on.

* * *

We had been clean for three weeks but were drinking more than we ever had. The fight started in the upstairs bedroom. Star leaped at me and her nails raked my face. I was shouting at her and punched her in the head and she kicked me hard. I fell back into the bedroom window. There was the sound of breaking glass.

She jumped at me again before I could get my balance back and was all nails and teeth. I rolled to get away from her but she seemed like she was coming from every direction. I picked her up and threw her across the room. She hit the dresser and bounced to the floor. One leg snapped off the dresser.

She stood up and grabbed the wedding picture that had fallen to the floor and smashed it against the wall and then threw the leaning dresser over and the drawers spilled out. She picked up a lamp and threw it at me and I ducked and it hit the mirror on the wall. Glass sprayed everywhere and I grabbed her by the arm hard. She leaned forward and bit my cheek.

I screamed and kicked her in the stomach and she curled up on the floor. I bent down and asked her if we could stop. I was frightened. She reached up real quick and grabbed my hair and spit in my face. I grabbed her hand that held my hair and squeezed it real hard and stamped on her foot with my boot as hard as I could and she let go.

I ran for the stairway just to get away from her and she hit me at the top of the stairs. We tumbled down like two wildcats in a fight to the finish. She was biting and scratching and punching. I kept hitting her over and over and she smashed her forehead into my head as we hit the bottom of the stairs.

I heard the snap of wood breaking and we fell through the broken bannisters. She pulled away from me and grabbed a vase and through it at the bay window. We had a three tier glass coffee table and she pulled the tv off the stand and dropped it through the table.

I came towards her to stop her from wrecking the place and she screeched and launched herself through the air at me like a wolverine in a killing frenzy. The momentum of the leap carried us into the kitchen. Everything was in motion.

We separated for a minute and stood there breathing at each other. There was blood running into my eye, Star's face was swollen on one side and one of her eyes were closed. Our clothing was all ripped. There was blood on her hands and blood on mine.

Star smashed one of the three glass cabinets with a cast iron frying pan that she pulled off the wall. She swept the cups and dishes from the shelves and ripped up her arm on the broken glass.

"How do you like this?" she screamed at me.

She smashed the second cabinet, swept the glasses to the floor and my throat was screaming as she whipped the pan at me. I ducked. It went through the plaster wall.

We came together and pummeled each other as we danced on the shards of glass.

I remember screaming at her. I remember holding her light body in the air like it was nothing and screaming at her. I remember holding her in the air by the throat and noticing suddenly that she was no longer moving.

There are spaces in time when God stops the clock.

* * *

Someone had called the police. When they came in I was kneeling over her and holding her hand. It took a few minutes for her to begin breathing normal again. They took her away in the ambulance. They took me to jail.

She did not press charges and the court was going to go for a violation of probation but for some reason they let me go.

On the way home I asked Star what had started the fight.

"I don't remember," she said.

Neither did I.

I had been fired from work and needed to look for another job. We were behind on the rent. We decided to stop drinking because of all the trouble. That afternoon I borrowed some money from my cousin and went out to buy us some heroin.

NANCY HEWITT

Your Edges

Somewhere in a field in Vermont your Swiss Army knife
lies rusting. Scores of sunglasses, umbrellas, single
and coupled gloves—all have fallen off the edge:
dropped into unknown crevasses, abandoned
in subway cars, lurking in uncleaned corners
of the house. I can tell when you've passed through—
screen door agape, dust pan on the counter, an open
jar of mayonnaise beside it, plastic bag on the stove,
footprints on the furniture. Paint cans too close
to the furnace, gas tank too close to empty—you get
as close as you can to the edge.
I could have
predicted this back in 1972, driving through Vegas
at midnight, you hanging out of the car snapping photos,
you hanging off a hundred cliffs since then, a better view
if you just moved out a little further, always affiliating
with the edge.
I might have predicted the rusted
barbed wire you piled beside the footpath,
the garden spade leaning in shadow, boards
with nails sticking up, in my way.
These visions
would have been harder to predict: you teetering 20 feet up
on two stories of ladders to rescue the cat. You herding
cows out of our perennials, then standing guard all night
because the farmer hadn't fixed his fence. You building
fortresses around our new trees to keep deer away
from the tender buds, keep them from crossing
over the edge.
Once I knew you by what
you lost and what you left behind.
Now I know you by what you want to save.

The Way Things Die

I hate the way squirrels die, always
on their backs, little begging legs
curled, tails fluffing from the wind
of passing cars. I hate how mice,
with their overbites, dropped
at my doorstep, always seem
to ask forgiveness. Garter snakes
in their death throes will writhe
into figure eights, turn inward,
want nothing.

I hate the way cats die, failed
by their kidneys or targeted
by cancer cells, last minutes of life
spent on a cold metal table. Our cat
who battled everything, how he lay
on the table, no last fight in him,
ready to leave before we were ready
to let him go. And our placid cat
who'd never caused a fuss,
how she raged at the end,
not able to get her breath
and wanting it.

I like the way they put them
in their boxes, kitten-curled, paws
over eyes, fur soft as ever while
the bodies cold, but I hate not knowing
if their eyes were open or closed.
And I hate the way her ear got bent
a little, too close to the lid, and how
I couldn't make it straight.

ANDREA M. HIGGINS

WITH LIBERTY & JUSTICE & THE ARTS FOR ALL

In 1989, the National Endowment for the Arts granted the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem, North Carolina $15,000. It was the responsibility of the Southeastern Center to then divide the grant in whatever way they deemed fit. Part of the Center's grant was used to support an exhibition by photographer Andres Serrano that included a photograph of a crucifix submerged in urine. At about the same time, the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania was using a portion of a $30,000 N.E.A. grant to fund the touring exhibit "Robert Maplethorpe: One Perfect Moment." The exhibit included 150 photographs, several of which were homeoerotic.

Although it is clear why some of the photographic images were offensive to many Americans, I think it is even more disturbing that the controversy that erupted was actually the result of political maneuvering by Senator Jesse Helms who was seeking reelection in 1990. In "Government and the Arts: An Overview" Dr. Milton C. Cummings Jr. who is a professor of political science at Johns Hopkins University writes:

> Helms had found an issue that, whatever the specific policy outcome for the National Endowment for the Arts, could be used to bolster his image back home as a prime supporter of traditional American values. His objective, then, was to frame the political question in such a way that to support the Arts Endowment's position was to oppose the moral sentiments of many Americans. Furthermore, he was determined to force his Senate colleagues to vote on the issue.
>
> (*Public Money* 67)

Suddenly, Senators, even those who had been strong supporters of the N.E.A., were scurrying for cover, fearing election-year-television spots that would tie their support of the endowment to the corruption of the country's moral fiber.

Unfortunately, this kind of political leveraging at the expense of the National Endowment for the Arts has continued. For example, in

a January 1995 *New York Times* article, columnist Robert Pear writes:

> Mr. Gingrich . . . portrays the endowment as a sandbox for the cultural elite. Mr. Armey [Representative Dick Armey of Texas] said that "the National Endowment for the Arts offends the Constitution of the United States."
>
> ("Battling for Its Existence")

If the N.E.A. is a sandbox, I suggest we take a closer look at who isthrowing the dirt around before allowing an organization that has been the stimulus for so much progress to be obliterated.

Contrary to Mr. Armey's claim, the National Endowment for the Arts was conceived by visionaries who recognized the many ways that the arts serve society—beautifying, challenging, and bringing together many cultures. In addition, the growth of the arts in our nation has resulted in unforseen benefits including a positive effecton the country's economy. I believe that the endowment's purpose, goals, and continued existence are more reflective of American values, and more important for the nations well-being than some politicians and conservative groups would have us believe.

To illustrate the endowment's contribution, I would like to momentarily step back in time to 1963. Livingston Biddle, a successful novelist, was asked by his close friend Senator Clairborn Pell to assist in writing legislation for a new bill that would provide for a National Arts Foundation. The goal of the foundation would be to stimulate the growth of arts in the United States. One section of Biddle's Congressional Report listed reasons that the bill should pass, and in his book *Our Government and the Arts: A Perspective from the Inside,* he reflects on his own legislation's description of art as "'central to our Nation's vitality'" and [his] forecast that the legislation would "'provide an urgently needed means for promoting our nation's well-being and for enhancing the development of our best talents'" (35). Biddle's forecast was correct; it was not just the arts community or the culturally elite who benefited, but the nation as a whole.

There are the obvious arguments in support of the arts: it's value in education, it's ability to serve as a bridge of understanding among cultures, as well as it's esthetic beauty. But for those who measure worth in dollar amounts, I would like to focus on the important role the arts have played in our country's economic growth. Arthur Levitt Jr., who from 1979-1989 served as chairman and chief executive officer of the American Stock Exchange, in his introduction to the book Public Money and the Muse, points to the strong connection between arts and economic vitality. He details how the arts in general, and the National Endowment for the Arts specifically, share a similar philosophy with companies that perform well in the business

market: he equates controversial art with companies that succeed because they are not afraid to take risks; he parallels the N.E.A.'s commitment to providing support for emerging artists with the success of businesses that have long-range vision, and spend money on research and development; finally, he points out that in both business and art, success is synonymous with commitment to quality (21). But Levitt does not only see art institutions as a model for successful business, he suggests that without art, business cannot survive. Levitt came to this conclusion by talking with hundreds of business leaders in communities that were both flourishing and struggling; this is what he discovered:

> the best places for locating businesses, for job growth, [and] for commercial viability, are those communities that support their cultural institutions . . . Business and culture are two integral, interdependent systems that are part and parcel of a thriving community. Without one, the other does not function optimally. Without both in place and working, the community is incomplete, in a sense handicapped. (23)

Isn't it strange that a Congress supposedly bent on growing the economy has failed to realize how counterproductive it would be to cut off support for the N.E.A.? Part of this may be due to the attacks on the endowment that intentionally create a public misconception of the role the Federal government plays in supporting the arts. Again, I refer to Mr. Paer's *New York Times* article in which Representative John Boehner of Ohio is quoted as saying, "We are out there living high on the hog, funding all these activities around the country, only to pass the bill on to our kids and grandkids" ("Battling For Its Existence"). In the same vein, Mr. Gingrich is quoted:

> Performance artists in a free society have the right to do the most extraordinary and bizarre things. That's called freedom of speech. But I don't believe they have a right to subsidized speech. There is no place in the Constitution that says the taxpayers must subsidize the wierdest things you can imagine. ("Battling for Its Existence")

Leaving aside the personal biases of these two statements, there is real misrepresentation (intentional or not) of the funding issue.

The N.E.A. does not fund art outright. That was never the intention. In writing about the initial legislation put before Congress, Biddle states, "grants were to be given to not-for-profit arts organizations on a matching basis, a departure from the European model of total government support without need for matching funds" (Biddle 34). In addition, the legislation was designed to encourage

the States to play an equally important role: States that were committed to increasing artistic opportunities in their communities would also received matching grants. In this way, Biddle and Pell envisioned a National Arts Foundation that would serve not as a crutch for the arts, but rather as an impetus for partnership between the arts and the community. Their hopes were realized; today, N.E.A. officials say that:

> their grants serve as an imprimatur, a seal of approval, making it easier for artists and art groups to raise money from other sources. . . . Each dollar from the endowment attracts $11 for the arts from state and local agencies, foundations, corporations, and other patrons.
>
> ("Battling for Its Existence")

With an $11 return for a one dollar investment and added benefits for the economy, it seems to me that rather than struggling for its existence, the N.E.A. should serve as an example for other government agencies.

There is a second argument about the federal governments role in arts funding that favors the decentralization of the N.E.A. But although the States and the Federal government serve the same basic purpose in terms of the allocation of funds, it would be a mistake to eliminate either's role. Professor Paul J. Dimaggio of Yale University's School of Organization and Management argues that "neither centralization nor devolution is a satisfactory substitute for the suppleness and responsiveness that a mixed system [of arts funding] affords" (Public Money 252). First, according to Diamaggio, "from the standpoint of arts organizations that receive government funds, the predictability and stability of funding may be as important as its amount" (243). State budgets can fluctuate drastically from year to year and do not offer the same stability that federal funds do. Large institutions such as museums and ballet companies can not survive drastic and unexpected fluctuations in their budgets, and therefore, rely heavily on Federal funding. States, on the other hand, are more likely to make more grants available. Although the grants are smaller in dollar amount at the state level, they offer more opportunities to the smaller and newer arts organizations that do not qualify for Federal funds. Second, Diamaggio points out that the mixed system "represents a form of risk pooling in an era of political vulnerability" (252). Artists whose works are particularly controversial are a huge risk for the N.E.A. at present, but the States offer another avenue for funding, and because local politicians do not risk the same political fallout, the line between art and politics seems to be drawn more clearly. Finally, Dimaggio points out that the

mixed system "permits experimentation and leadership to emerge at different levels" (252). The arts permeates every facet of our society, from small town community theater to the largest art museum; it would be inappropriate to fund each of these institutions in the same way because each have different needs; the combination of State and Federal resources insures that the arts will thrive at each level.

The tendency of some politicians to suggest that arts funding is in conflict with the best interest of the people is, as this short survey has shown, misleading and potentially damaging to the nation's well being. The attacks have left the public with the misconception that the arts are a luxury that few enjoy, and many subsidize. But in fact, whether or not private citizens choose to take advantage of the cultural opportunities available to them, they still benefit from a culturally rich society. The arts and the N.E.A. are not draining the nation's financial resources, but rather contributing to the nation's vitality.

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ALEXIA BERRY

ALEXIA BERRY

ALEXIA BERRY

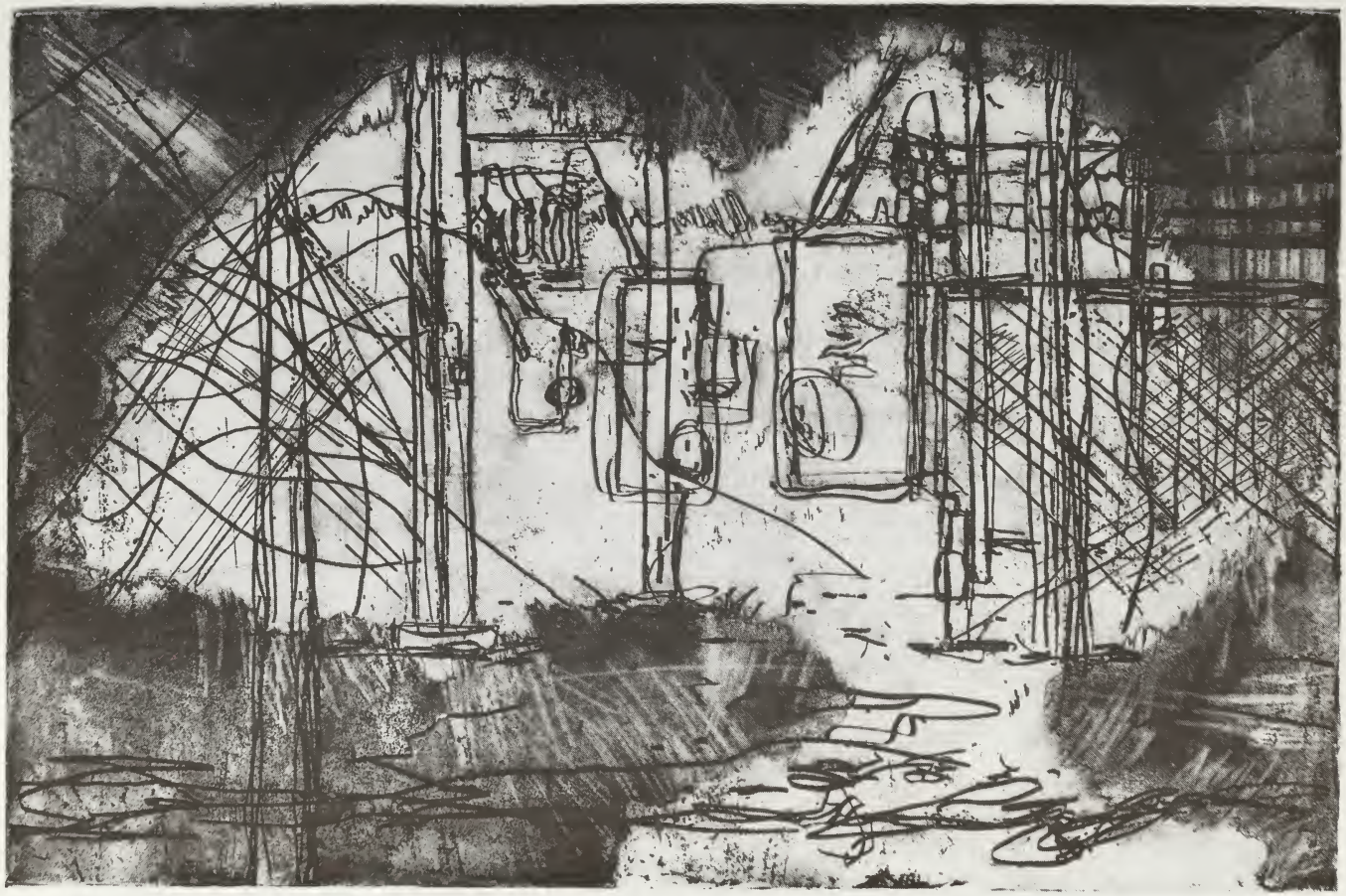
ALEXIA BERRY

BERNARD MEANEY

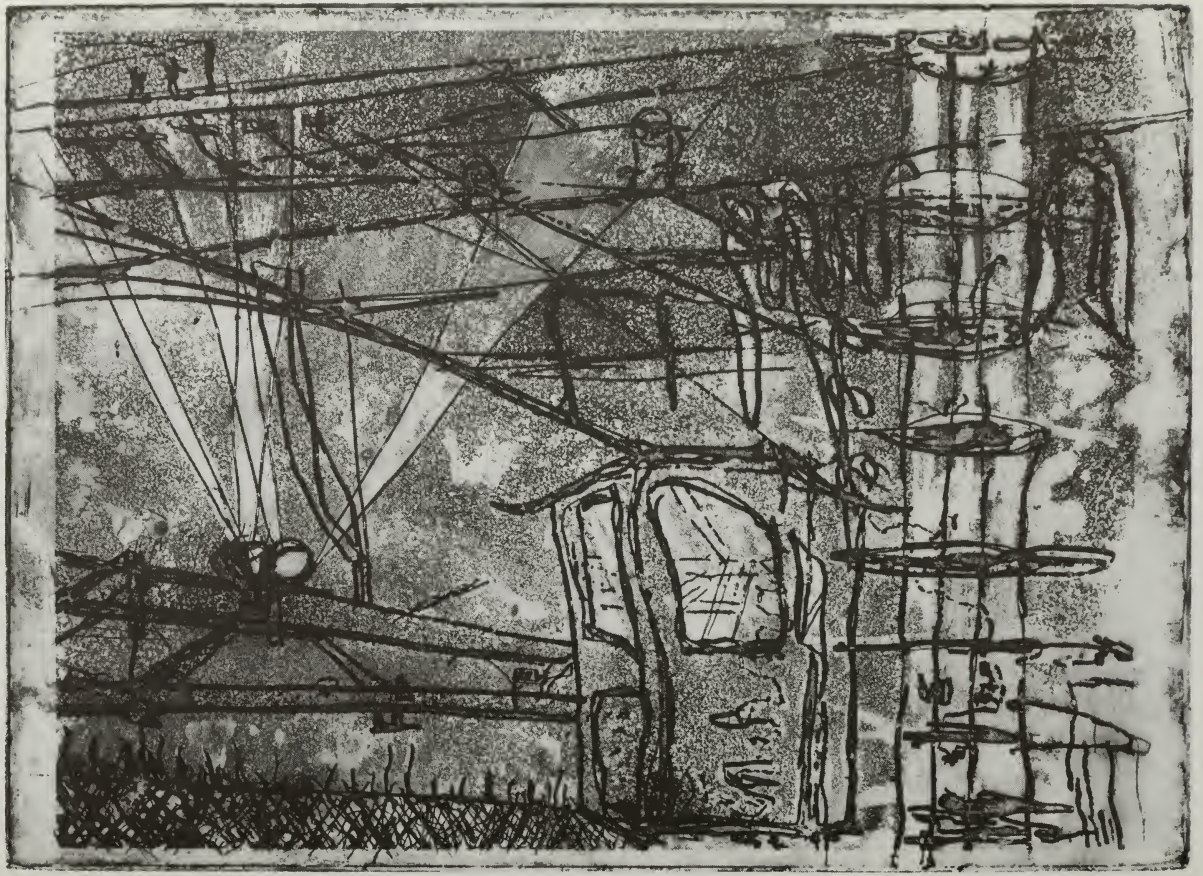
BERNARD MEANEY

SO WHAT'S NEW?
ACUPUNCTURE AND MY SPECKIES. HOW D'I LOOK?
GLASUS! YOU GETTING OLD OR SOMETHING?
SMAK
NO, JUST FAT WITH A FUZZY OUTLOOK
THE WORLD IS AS YOU SEE IT.
YUP, & MINE WAS PRACTICALLY ANGORA
HOW'D ALL THIS COME ABOUT?
WELL, TO BEGIN WIT, I WAS COUPED UP IN MY STUDIO CRANKING OUT VELVIS'S*
LIVING ON PIZZA & POPSICLES WHEN I LOOKED IN THE MIRROR ONE DAY...
HUNKA HUNKA BURNIN LOVE
WHEN DID THIS HAPPEN?
CRYPES AGAIN?!
FUN HOUSE
*VELVIS: BLACK VELVET ELVIS PAINTING.
& I SAYS TO MYSELF "GEE SEYMOUR, WHAT'S A MATTER? YOU LOOK LIKE A MACY'S THANXGIVING DAY PARADE BLIMP READY TO FLOAT DOWN 5TH AVE...
OY WHAT A FUNK I DID FEEL.
WHY DIDN'T YOU CALL?
BECAUSE THINGS CHANGED IN AN INSTANT WHEN I GOTTA CALL FROM THE PEPPY PERSONNEL OF TEMP ARENA
SISTER BRO SNAP DRAGON? YOU LIKE WANNA BE OUR GAL FRIDAY? AND LIKE SELL SOCKS TIL YOU CAN'T STAND IT NO MORE?
HUH!
GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO BE HAPPY ALL THE TIME! GREAT BENNYFITS! FREE PANNY HOSE! FREE PROZAC AFTER ONLY 6 MONTHS!
WHO COULD SAY NO? EVEN THO MY HEAD STARTED POUNDING LIKE PEARL JAM
THEN I HAD SUPPER WITH AN OLD PAL WHO LATER USED me as a pin cushion.
WHAT? YOU SPEET OUT DAT GOO MEGAWHOOPS OF IBPROFUN, NOW! BAYBE YOU HEAD SHE HURT? WELL, IF I STEEK PEEN EEN YOU SNOOT MERIDIAN
ZEE PAIN, SHE GO BYE.
SO, I WENT FOR IT, AND...
I GOT SUCKED RIGHT OUT OF MYSELF BY A WHIRLING THINGIE THAT CAME OUT OF THE SPACE HEATER, I THINK
SEE, I STILL GOTS BITTY GOAD PINS FOR MUNCHY SUPPRESSION
COOL, HOW'S IT WORK?
EVERY TIME I REACH OUT FOR A WHOOPIE PIE I GIVE IT A LITTLE SQUEEZE
LIKE YOW! NO DING DONGS PLEASE. THEN WHENEVER I ANSWER THE PHONE AT WORK THE RECIEVER SMACKS A PIN IN MY HORNS
YELLO?
SOCK LAND
WHAAADYA WAAANT? DANG IT?
I MEAN, LIKE HERE, YOU EAT ALL THE SOOLOOKIE BEANS, YOURSELF. IT'S YOUR COMPANY I CRAVE, AND ONE CUPPA JAVA SERVED IN A BIRD BATH WITH A CUT OFF GARDEN HOSE FOR POWER SUCKING.
YOU KNOW, I LIKE MY JAVA STRAIGHT FROM THE POT
TELL ME, IS THAT REALLY TRUE, OR JUST A BUTCH THING?

KARA MICHELINE TUTUNJIAN



KARA MICHELINE TUTUNJIAN



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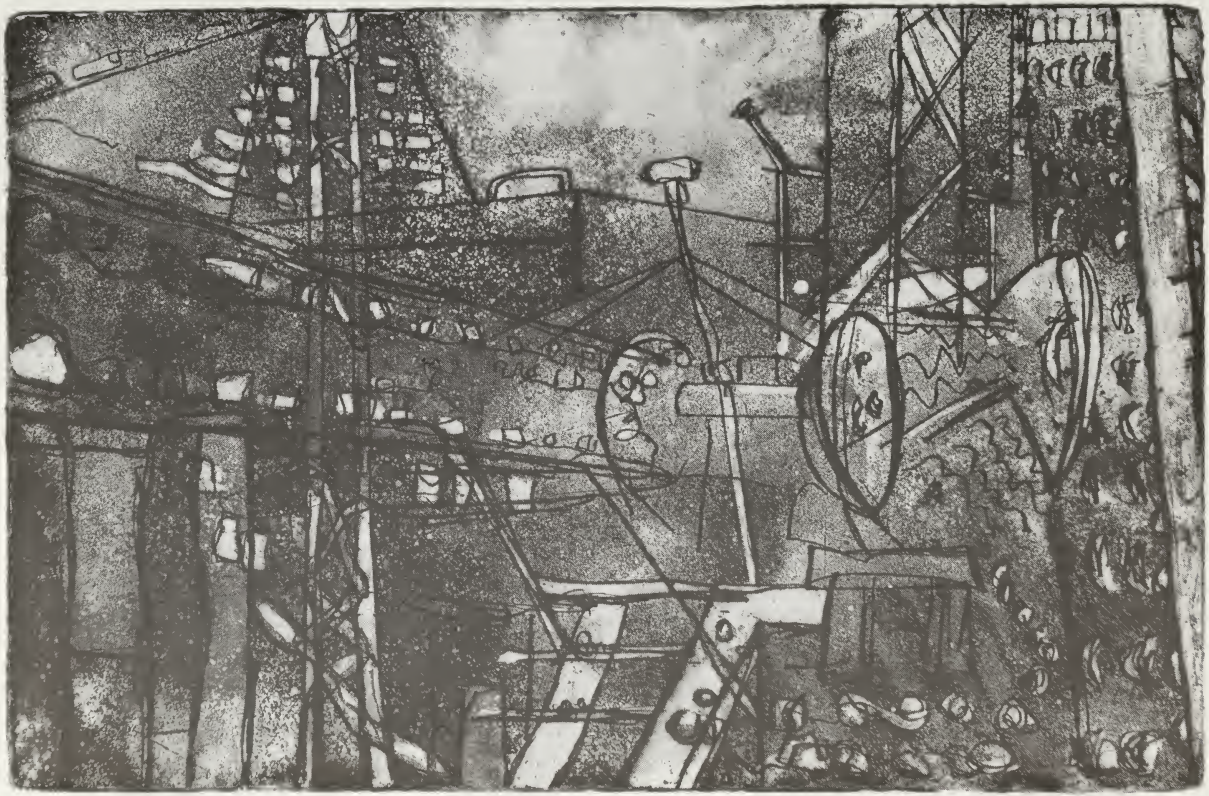

KARA MICHELINE TUTUNJIAN

STEPHEN A. BAILEY

HEATHER KAPPLOW

Enamel

You stand
dark and hairy
in my salmon-colored bathrobe

praising the invention
of baking soda toothpaste,

smacking your lips
while I hug my knees
at the kitchen table.

YUK-TAI MAN

HER CLEANEST, SHARPEST KNIFE

I never heard this story from my grandmother. My grandmother speaks no English—or only single words: *ceiling, coffee, hello.* I heard this story from my mother. She was there: it was her birth. But, being born, my mother might have missed something.

In this story, my grandmother sits in the kitchen of a farmhouse. Outside, the soil is red, and the hills green. It's early but already warm. This is Canton, I think. It's always humid.

In the kitchen, my grandmother sweats. She gasps—the contraction passes. She is in labor and alone. I don't know why they had left her alone. Maybe she had had pains before; maybe her water had broken at dawn—after they had gone to the fields. But, maybe they weren't her family. Maybe on this farm, she was only another hand, the cook's helper, and her husband, a migrant laborer, far away—north, following the harvests, looking for work.

I don't know how long my grandmother might have labored. I don't know how long she might have sweated, groaned. She might have cried out. But, no help had come, even when the infant crowned. I don't remember every lesson on emergency childbirth; on childbirth emergencies: abruptio placentae, placenta previa, prolapsed cord, transverse lie.

But, my grandmother found none of these. Instead, she found her first child. My grandfather, though, would always scorn this child. He would almost abandon her for being born first—a girl. Not rich, my grandfather would nevertheless take a second wife. He wanted sons, and my grandmother had failed. But, this failure my grandmother would not fix. She would glean the rice fields with this child, when she could not earn enough. She would flee with this child to Hong Kong, when the Japanese armies invaded the countryside, and then back to country, when the Japanese bombed the city. She would almost lose this child. Her daughter would almost drown twice—once in one river and again in another. Her daughter would live. Her daughter would cross an ocean to America. My grandmother would have grandchildren.

But, my grandmother knew none of this. She was no longer alone. She lay back against the kitchen floor. Beneath her, the earth was cool and only faintly damp. She held her child closer. She had taken a dish from its shelf and put it nearby. She reached for that dish and smashed it. With this, her cleanest, sharpest knife, she cut the umbilical cord of her child.

JENNY McCRACKEN

LE MISTRAL

The street was loud. She went into the café and the noise became muffled as the door closed behind her. She sat down and looked around from her corner table without meeting any eyes. There were only old men drinking at the bar, red in the face and laughing. A neatly dressed waiter came and without expression took her order.

"Un café, s'il vous plaît," she said in her best accent.

"Très bien, Mademoiselle."

It was a freedom she was not willing to give up, sitting alone in cafés watching people and day dreaming. It was like stealing, knowing she would be caught. After a while some man would come to her table hoping she wanted company. She lit a cigarette and sunk into her chair and heavy clothes, relieved not to be moving.

From the window she could see the yellow headlights of little cars circling madly around the square, a fountain in the center, heroic lions spitting water. And she could see along the boulevard, the endless row of bookstalls, black boxes with their expensive secrets locked inside, perched on the long wall looking down into the Seine. And farther down, beyond the nearly naked trees, the Eiffel Tour, as big as her thumb, all lit up and golden.

This is where she often came on her nights off, if she wasn't meeting Joe the chicken man. She called him that, but never to his face, because he was old and scrawny and had a pointy nose and the skin hung off his neck like drapery and wagged when he turned his head. So she lied about having to stay with the children because of Madame Simon going out of town on business. He never came to this café. She was too tired to talk to him tonight. Joe was very hard of hearing, so her voice would get hoarse from yelling. She had no stories to tell him.

Le Mistral, the café was called, which seemed right, because the wind always managed to come through those big plate glass windows. And the waiters always brought her the coffee without grimacing at her French and let her sit for a long time without ordering anything else. This night was particularly cold. She wanted to stretch her 10 francs as far as they would go.

She wrapped her coat around her legs and lit another cigarette and listened to the sounds of the café around her; the gentle "clink-

clank" of cups and saucers and wine glasses hitting the marble table tops, the barman and the waiters talking in their low voices, the common french rolling out of their mouths like a slow, distant, summer storm, and the sharp, short sounds of chair legs scraping against the tiles, and the old men at the bar talking about soccer matches and union strikes in accents that seemed as deep and far away as the catacombs.

She liked this café because there was no one in it to remind her of what she might be doing in some other more boisterous place, like tossing her head or showing her teeth or saying clever things in French, like she had those many nights with Jules.

Now that she didn't have him to keep her company there were only the children and Joe. The children didn't really count. They wouldn't speak French slow enough for her to understand. But she knew what they were saying as she set their meals before them. They complained about the food, complained about her, called each other disgusting and stupid, just as she and her brother had when they were nine and ten. But she and her brother never complained about the food and they never had a nanny.

And so there was Joe and the children and no more Jules.

The metro station in the center of the square was like a bee hive. Only those dim figures coming out, going in, coming in, going out, betrayed the humming activity of that brightly lit and sour smelling underground world. It was warm down there, even if the air was thick and made her sweat in her winter coat. And there, the night never seemed to end.

It smelled like him. He was always there, swaying in the car, begging for change. *"S'il vouz plaît, Mademoiselle, pour la musique."* He was always with her, but in those dirty white gleaming endless tunnels, she could almost touch him. He wasn't like those other urchin boys who rode the line from Chattillon to Saint-Denis.

He had gotten on the car she was riding one night, late on her way back from seeing the chicken man, her ears ringing. *"Bon Soir, Mesdames, Mesdemoiselles, Messieurs."* And he started to play. She could tell he wasn't just playing for wine money. He played the accordion, pushing out mournful notes. The most incredible melancholy washed over her. So beautiful and so sad! She hadn't know she wanted to cry until she looked up at him. His small hands were struggling across the keyboard. His neck bent with the weight of it. And there was something in his eyes, so dark and the way his mouth turned down at the corners from concentrating on his fingers. That burst her dam, and she cried. The other passengers looked at her. She

searched her pockets and could not find a tissue, so she wiped her face on her sleeves. At least the music and the rumbling of the train covered her. They could see her, but they couldn't hear her. Somehow he must have known, because he looked up. It only made it worse; her face turned red and she could feel her tears burning down her cheeks, leaving white tracks behind and her sleeves were getting soggy. The train came to the next station and she hoped he would get off, but he didn't. He kept on playing. When he finished the song he came and sat next to her, pulling McDonald's napkins from his pocket. Jules.

* * *

Maybe she would walk back to the apartment. That way she wouldn't feel him so close. By now, Madame Simon would be passed out in front of the T.V. She could sneak in without talking to her, get a glass of whiskey from the cabinet. She closed the book she had been pretending to read, put her cigarettes in her coat pocket and was fishing around for the 10 francs when the door banged open, letting the cold air rush in.

Into the café came a whoosh of white, swaying as it made it's way to the middle of the café. It was a man. He was dressed in a flowing pierrot costume, slightly stained and soiled along the hems. His face was made up white with eyes and mouth traced in black, the make-up smearing in places. He took a seat in an imaginary chair that wobbled. The waiter came immediately to his side.

"Voulez-vous prendre une table, s'il vous plaît monsieur," he asked, the twitch of his jaw muscles betraying his irritation.

She had been about to leave, but she decided to order another coffee. Pretending to read her book again, she watched him over the tops of the pages. He gestured to the waiter, waving his hand gracefully over his knees and smiling as if to say, But Monsieur, this table suits me very well.

"Très bien," the waiter sighed, shrugging his shoulders, his jaw still twitching.

The man in white shifted his weight, almost losing his balance. He looked around the café smiling generously. None of the the customers seemed to notice. When he turned his head in her direction, she quickly hid her face behind the book. The waiter brought him a glass of wine. He took a big swallow with grand graceful movements, his little finger in the air. With his other hand he rubbed his stomach with big circles. Then he let loose a satisfied belch. Some of the customers turned their heads, disgusted. Taking another swallow, he lost his footing and spilled the rest of the red wine on his white blouse. He stood up and stretched his legs one at a time, pointing his toes at the ceiling then the floor like a dancer. As he bent his knees to

plier, he lost his balance and fell. Then he put a hand on his imaginary chair and pulled himself up. As he did, he caught her staring at him and he widened his ridiculous painted grin. Taking a sip of coffee she looked back down at the book. She lit another cigarette and tried to look bored. He began to stare at her. Oh, no she thought. Oh no, he's staring at me. She looked out the window thinking, if Jules were here, he'd invite him to their table. He'd buy him a glass of wine with the last of her money. But he wasn't there. She pretended not to see him.

She wanted to remember this well, so she could tell the story to Joe. He liked good stories. He fed off them. He lived for them. When she sat down at their table in their café he always kissed her first on the cheek, then said, So, did you bring me any stories? They were the most valuable thing a person could have, he said, because they were treasures you could carry in your head, and you could always find some one willing to trade for them. She knew he was a little crazy, but it was good to tell him stories. She needed a new one. He had heard, by now, the story of Jules in many versions. It had worn thin like an old sock.

The man in the white costume was again sitting, waving his empty glass of wine in the air. She marvelled at this magic trick, sitting like that. She wondered who would clean his lovely white suit. If there was anyone, or would he wash it alone, in a little sink in his *chambre de bonne*, his head pounding in the morning.

The waiter came and filled his glass, and told him it was the last. When he'd finished he'd have to move on. Drinking from his glass, again with the same big, graceful movements, it made her think of cartoons or ballet. When she looked up from her book again, he was staring at her. People always know when they are being watched. It's as if you touch them.

The man put his fingers to his mouth, threw back his hand, then pursing his lips he blew his breath out in her direction. She wasn't sure what he meant. Oh no, is he blowing me a kiss? she thought, wrinkling her brow at him. He did it again, then coughed and slapped his chest dramatically. Oh, he wants a cigarette! Of course! Then she felt silly. She nodded at him and smiled. Swaying, he took careful steps over to her table. His movements were getting sloppy. He drew a cigarette from the pack she held out, and making a big circle through the air, brought it to his mouth, leaning over so she could light it for him. Then he took a curtain call bow, almost falling over. He staggered back to his spot, and simply collapsed, passed out. The wine glass broke as it hit the floor. The still lit cigarette lay burning next to his head.

Two of the waiters came and heaved him up by the armpits and dragged him out to the street. She could see the limp, white pile of him from where she sat. His breaths rose up in dense little clouds. It made her think of old photographs she had seen of supposed souls floating out of bodies at the moment of death.

She couldn't leave him there. She put her coat on and went out to the street. At least she could get him down to the metro. As she put her arms around his back, she felt how slender he really was. Much smaller than he looked in his billowing costume. Still he was heavy, but she was strong. Holding on to one of his arms, she managed to pull him up on her back. She dragged him across the street passing in front of a row of waiting yellow headlights, across the square to the metro entrance. The fountain had been turned off and the Eiffel Tower was no longer lit.

Going down the metro stairs, the warm air came up in sickly sweet smelling gusts. She could now smell the wine he'd drunk as he breathed on her neck. Getting down the steps was awkward and he started to slip off her back pulling her coat against her neck. She let him down gently, then pulled him back with his arm across her shoulders, her arm around his waist. Leaning against the wall she made her way slowly down. His feet made soft thuds as they fell from step to step. Her breathing was getting heavy. At the bottom of the stairs she stopped and let him down. If she could just get him to the platform, the metro police would leave him alone for the night.

Pulling him up like a big bag of laundry, she backed through the turn style with him. Her heart was pounding and he was getting heavier and heavier. So she dragged him along the ground on his back, sorry that his costume would turn black. She thought of him scrubbing. Just a few more steps and she let him down against the wall on the platform.

She sat down next to him, still breathing hard, took off her coat and lit a cigarette. She looked at his face, now so close. Most of the make-up had come off of one side. His skin was course and bumpy and scarred underneath. Ravaged and red. He had a regal french nose that was probably larger from the drink and giant round eyes set deep in hallowed sockets.

Her train pulled in, but she didn't get on. She'd wait, just a little, till the next one came. Not knowing why, she thought she should watch him, watch over him, just for a while. He turned his head and moved a hand ever so slightly, and it felt better to see him stir. It was like watching a pigeon with an eye missing or a foot, or whose feathers had been pecked off. It made her feel helpless, sorry and disgusted all at once. At least he wouldn't freeze. He wouldn't lose any toes.

Watching this stranger's eyes move slowly beneath his eyelids, his chest heaving softly, she wondered why she never pitied Jules. He drank too much like this man, and sometimes he'd told her, he slept it off in the metro, or on the street if it was warm enough, when he was too drunk to make it back to his filthy mattress in the squat. She wondered why this never frightened her. She wondered where he was, on this cold, cold night.

After letting three or four trains go without her, she finally got on one. She watched the man in white from the back window of the last car, getting smaller and smaller until she was surrounded by the black of the tunnel.

Un café, s'il vous plaît. — A coffee please.
Très bien. — Very well.
Le Mistral — The name of a wind that blows in France.
S'il vous plaît Mademoiselle, pour la musique. — Please Miss, for the music.
Chattion, St.Denis — Two suburbs of Paris, to the south and north respectively.
Bon Soir Mesdames, Mesdemoiselles, Messieurs. — Good Evening Ladies, *Gentlemen,* Young Ladies.
pierrot — pantomime character
Voulez-vous prendre une table, s'il vous plaît Monsieur.— Would you take a table please, sir.
chambre de bonne — Literally translated, "maid's room," they are rooms on the top floors of large old Parisien houses. The rooms are under the roof and are usually quite small (closet sized). They used to house the servants of rich families. Nowadays they are rented out like boarding house rooms.

MARGUERITE E. McGRAIL

Drown

Fit you on like a dirndl
Twirl and watch the fabric
Rise over my head
And the sea stings
Though I am made of it
So I go back to it
Smile my last
Drink, at last
This ocean until I am just paper
I will be over except for all of this paper.

LINDA McMASTER

(word) Edgewise

A goofy guy hyper bouncing laughing sulking up again
down again around and around blood spinning twirling
before he takes a breath and he's off.
One o'clock in the morning and he's on the phone
bemoaning his lack of love and all the while asking:
how to get rid of writer's block (like *I* know),
and should he take the $38,000 a year guaranteed job
or try and be a teacher. Tired of my answering
before he's through asking he's whirling again, a
dizzying spin of querying worrying wondering when
will his friends be together again (they don't
like each other, Ryan). Shouting all of a sudden
he's gotten an idea for a story and then he has to go and
he's gone again, and laughing and breathless—I hang up.

THOMAS O'MALLEY

SAMHAIN

For three days and three nights my grandmother's coffin lay open in a bedroom of the cottage. During the days the house was filled with the keening of local women intermingled with Christian prayer and the rattle of rosary beads. During the night a large *seisiun* of men and women settled before the great hearth. Bottles of *poitin* clattered empty and casks of stout rattled hollow.

I inhaled the pungent aroma of the dried bog that burned in the hearth and listened, fighting, straining against sleep, to the beat of the *bodhran* and the melancholic dirge of the *uilleann* pipes and the fantastic tales envisioned and encouraged by my grandmother's death, of the *puca* and the *siog*, both of which posed a constant threat to my grandmother's Christian soul.

I shared a bedroom with my sister and our dead grandmother. Long after my sister had fallen asleep I listened to the haunting chorus from the other room, pipes and drums and a hubbub of Gaelic that reverberated throughout the cottage like ancient winds of another time. I watched the dim light of a candle nervously illuminating the open hood of my grandmother's coffin and the dark shadow of a wooden crucifix upon the cracked stone wall and I imagined all the fantastic daemons and faeries waiting, waiting for the candle to die, to rush in from the otherworld and tear my grandmother's soul from her body.

There is a flash of sunlight upon metal as my father raises the scythe in an arc that follows the contours of his taut back—a pale rowan branch that looks ready to snap—and then the blade descends, tirelessly, again and again and again. Clearing the field so that he can dig his mother's grave he frantically chases the day across the sky until a ragged horde of clouds tremble upon the horizon and are ravaged, torn through by brilliant garnet streaks of fading sunlight. Then he finally rests to wipe the sweat from his eyes and I watch his trembling back and I realize he is crying.

One night I sat before the hearth, invisible and unseen by the mourners about me. The fire burned as a fever upon my face, my eyes blurred in the heat and yet I did not move away for I could not move

away. I watched in dazed fascination as the flames crawled and danced and created fantastic otherworldly creatures upon the blackened brick. I felt a large gentle hand upon my shoulder as my uncle Pateen knelt down beside me, his face gnarled and twisted as an ancient withered tree in the flickering light.

"Sure you're a quare quite lad, Tomas," he said and ruffled my hair, the odour of *poitin* sour upon his breath. "Come away from the fire now, you'll make yourself sick."

He led me from the warmth of the fire to a dark window overlooking the coastal waters. I stared out into the black starless night and listened as the wind rushed in off the water, felt it press against the glass and calm and cool me.

"Do you hear the banshee callen?" Pateen asked, his eyes shining wetly.

Turf hissed and crackled in the hearth, the wind that whipped across the water sighed through the dark timbers of the cottage and groaned in the chimney. And as I turned and looked about the room the fire leapt and flickered upon all the crumbling faces that smiled here and talked here and sang here.

"Yes," I finally whispered in awe and fear. "Yes, I hear the banshee callen."

My father lifts me above the edge of the coffin and I kiss my grandmother goodbye but she is so so very cold and my breath shudders and constricts my throat and I can't breathe I can't breathe and then the tears are rushing uncontrollably down my cheeks and I am shaking and I can't speak and I don't understand and I can't explain—and my father crushes me against him and I hear his sobs echoed in mine.

The stars are lost tonight behind a wall of cloud. In the darkness I can make out their rumbling stagger across the sky. Through a black curtain of rain the candle in my grandmother's window casts a feeble glow, squinting into the courtyard where I lie stretched across the ground.

The earth is soft and wet against my back and I am laughing into a downpour of frozen sheets that scathe the skin, but *poitin* trembles warmly in my stomach and brightly illuminates the hollow that is my skull. *The siog are always looking for a way into heaven* Pateen says and his voice is a reel of banging drums and shrieking discordant pipes. *Sure they're an awful bitter lot an they'll try to get in pretending they're your grandmother, a course that would never fool God an so they'll jus take her soul in spite. So watch out lad. I said watch out. Sure do you hear me? Are you listening?* I reach outward and upwards blindly into the rain and it embraces me with cold hard hands, shapes me like soft malleable rock and I am melting, melting

into this barren earth where nothing ever grows, nothing takes root, everything just dies and dies again and then so do I—slowly.

My father and his brothers take turns digging the grave. Voiceless thoughts seem to echo about the field and are revealed in somber nods and determined glances. I am ethereal, a wraith, and they do not see me and so I can watch, silently resting upon a decaying, crumbling earthen wall. A mist clings to the black ground like the skirts of angels, that part before and then clings to the legs of the gravediggers.

Through the savage cries of the sea I hear the grunts of exertion, the hacking coughs of chilled and aching lungs, and the metal shovels gorging and disemboweling the wet earth, raised and flung, falling, falling and scattered upon this surreal white surface. I roll the earth in my hand, black and moist and cold, and I imagine it enclosing my grandmother's coffin, and years from now the stretched taut yellow skin of her shrivelled, decomposed form and beyond that, her white glistening bones.

The polished bones of all the dead tap incessantly beneath my feet, clawing their way, reaching up, to drag me down to rot with them.

As my father digs the grave with a fervour that is frightening, that seems like madness—it has been this way for days but no one will stop him—does he think of how his mother will rot, atrophy into nothingness? When I eventually look into his startled, frantic eyes I understand and realize—that he does.

My grandmother has been buried four days now in the bogs of Oughterard, between the faerie cairns and raths, and amidst the rocks fractured with green marble that burst as flowers from this barren landscape. The candles have all been extinguished, the *poitin* has run dry, and the last Christian prayers recited in Gaelic have been thrust heavenward. No *puca* will touch her now.

The rock is cold beneath me but then so is my body, so is the harsh wind raging off the Atlantic, buffeting the coast, whipping the grey clouds above. Early this morning everyone left for the Galway races but I am ethereal again, a hungry invisible wraith and so no one saw me. Gradually I become the rock, impervious; or the rushing wind, intangible, and I am no longer a child; I am not longer cold.

Upon the tossing waves there are black dancing shapes and upon the moaning wind I hear their human cries, flung desolate and abandoned towards the shore. A congregation of grey seals; the dead enchanted into animal form or as Pateen believes, the people whom Noah left outside the Ark. And now I am crying because I am no longer alone, and I am comforted by their dirgeful tears.

Suddenly I am aware of the Autumn constellations glittering as old tired eyes, squinting from so far away. A start plummets across the steel-grey sky, a needle threading through the constellations, the broken ribs, the skeletal remains of the dead. And now out upon the ravaged wind torn rock *Listen* I hear voices I recognize and my tears become joyful and expectant. It is my Uncle Padraig and *Listen* it is Oweny and *Listen Listen* it is my grandmother. My clothes are sodden and shaped against my bones and I am laughing into the terrible wind. I am being shaped and worn away like soft rock. I am melting, melting into this barren earth *Listen Listen* where nothing ever grows, nothing takes root *Listen* and nothing ever ever dies.

Can't you hear them?

RENATA ROSKOPF

One in a Million

I am not the one
you read about
in that personal ad.
I'd never have had
time to write it, so I definitely
don't want to squander
my time but rather, the thought
of spending it
with a person who had time
to read all the personals
on page thirty-two.

RICHARD SHEEHAN

NHUNG

I was driving home from *Vung Tau* to bring back some memories for my friend *Nhung*, who hasn't seen her childhood since the age of eleven. *Vung Tau:* where rich rice fields fill the ground, and mountains in the distance give it shade, and Mary, who *Nhung* used to wave to, stands tall and white, close to the white puffy clouds not far from heaven, looking out over the calm sea. *Thuy Van* Beach, where the water is silken clear and the sun beaming hot, and the children play in the brown sand or float in their black rounded air tubes, this is where *Nhung* would sneak off after lunch pretending to sleep with her father on their hammock on those summer afternoons. Knowing she would be punished later by the long bamboo stick, she still did it again and again. The ocean is where she needed to be. Free to skip pebbles on the water. Free to draw faces in the sand. Free to act like a bird. Today she lives by the ocean, rollerblading on the walkway, next to the sand, near the ocean, having fun and acting like a child, making up the lost time which war took away from her.

We stopped the van to rest the engine. *Chung* pointed out that this place was once a rubber plantation under the French. The thin trees were lined up in rows, and stretched quite a distance. The place looked exhausted. Hollow. I had started video taping the trees when I felt someone pulling on my arm. I stopped taping and looked straight ahead but no one was there, until I looked down and saw a little girl asking me to buy some eggs. Having said no, I could not ignore her eyes as she looked at me deeply with her sad face. She wore dirty pink shorts and a dirty, ripped yellow shirt. She had no sandals. *Chung* smiled as I looked at him. He had many meanings behind his smile. Then *Chung* asked her name. "*Nhung* her name," *Chung* said. "*Dung*," I said. "No, *Nhung*." *Chung* walked off to have a cigarette. *Nhung* kept looking at me. She kept raising her left arm to sell those eggs. She followed me back to the van. But we couldn't leave right away because the others were buying fresh fruit. June was fruit season. The van was locked. I leaned against it for support. *Nhung* kept repeating her Vietnamese to me: "Chu lam on mua dum toi may trai trung ga duoc khong? Chu lam on mua dum toi may trai trung ga duoc khong?"

Then I saw what I didn't want to see—children begging. Everywhere I visited there were homeless children.

At a cafe in *Hoc Mon*, a boy holds out his hand asking for money. When you gesture no, he knows you're lying. In *Saigon* at night where the streets are busy and the lights are graceful, a little girl in front of the hotel asks for money. When you say no, she then asks if you can take her to America. When you say no again, she goes to the next foreigner who comes out of the hotel and puts her arm around his arm and asks the same questions.

Just a week ago, enjoying *Bun Bo Hue* with *Hieu, Tri, Van,* and *Dung* in *Hue,* with the view of the *Huong Giang* and *Trang Tien* Bridge where young couples meet and fall in love, a boy with a bloated stomach comes up to our table and grabs my Pepsi. He drinks it, burps, and runs outside to wait. The owner then puts on the TV and my friends gather around, leaving me alone at the table. *Hue's* national football team has beaten *Saigon's* national team. My friends are excited as they watch the highlights at the airport. The boy comes back, his face in the bowl, slurping quickly. *Tri* looks back, but football is more important. I care, but there is nothing I can do. The owner doesn't do anything because the boy works for him during the day. The boy stares at me waiting for my bowl of soup which is almost finished. He inches over by my side, but suddenly runs outside, and starts throwing up.

At the beach, an old woman with wrinkled skin and a *non la* who survived two wars walked slowly in front of me, got down on her knees, and put her two hands together to beg for money. I looked away as the little waves sprinkled on the shore.

Then I thought about *Viet Nam* last year being third in the world exporting rice to other countries. And then I looked at *Nhung,* who was now whining and on the verge of crying, waiting for me to buy those eggs so perhaps she could eat some rice.

I put both hands in my pocket where *Nhung* took it as a sign. I could feel the *dong* in my hands. She pulled on my arm anticipating that I would take the money out. At last, I saw *Chung* and the others walking towards the van. He saw the situation and read my face. I stared at him and asked, "Should I?" "Its okay. Up to you." He took another cigarette out from his pocket and began talking to his friend, leaning on the mirror. I guess he knew what I was going to do. I took out 5000 *dong* and gave it to *Nhung*. At that moment, at least nine other children swarmed around me to get me to buy something. Their voices echoed in my ears—their products in my face, their hands touching my body—as I stood there. My stomach tightened and my heart sunk. *Chung* yelled at them, smoke came out of his mouth. The little children scattered for a brief moment.

I got back in the van and sat on the other side of the ripped vinyl seat, staring out the window—looking at the rice paddies and the buffalo for relief. I saw *Chung* staring at me, but paid no attention to him. The van began to move and my view became blurred. I closed my eyes for a moment and rested my head against the window, dozing off. *Nhung's* face appeared. Then I felt my arm being pulled. I jerked up. It was *Thuy. I picked her up and held her in my arms as the driver kept beeping his horn heading for Saigon.*

TANYA STUBBS

STARING DOWN TIME

Staring out the window of the Jeep day after day, state after state (of mind), watching the world change, watching time go by, watching my life go by in a blur without getting out of the car and claiming each beautiful place as my own. Time seems distorted now. It is elusive, like the wind. This time I look out the window and see giant evergreens on top of mountains. Next time I look out the window I'm in a different world. It is startling to look out and see rolling grasslands. How did I get here? What happened? I only looked down for a few minutes. Wait! I want to go back. I didn't feel at one with the evergreens and the mountains. I wanted to stand amongst them and feel tall and strong and ever-something, if not green.

Looking ahead into the purple mountains, I see the silhouette of an Indian lying down across the mountaintops. Looking into the chasm of the Grand Canyon, I look into the dark reaches of my mind. In the mirror I see rows of corn, cattle trucks with shit oozing out, dried up arroyo's at the corners of my eyes, and sparkling rivers winding their way down my cheeks. Who *is* that staring back at me? I look so different now. I've changed in profound ways. How could I not? I've conquered mountains and monsters in the night. I built a campfire in the rainforest, and had a new radiator installed in the Jeep after the fan blew a bearing. I did it! Will I be able to paste this person I've become back into my life when I return? Or have I eroded in some places and augmented in others so that the resulting contours are incongruous with the rest of the painting that is my life?

Time has no meaning here. I wear my watch every day. Why? I wake when the sun comes up and I know it's morning. I sense the sun high in the sky and feel its heat on my arms and legs, and I know it's midday. I see the sun dropping behind the mountain and I know it is evening. It's as if, by wearing the watch, I can control time somehow. What a fool. The world spins at the same speed all day long, only now I can almost see it spinning out of my control, and yet it's o.k. because I've no place to be except in this Jeep, watching the world go by.

Funny that I say the world is going by, because I'm really the one going by in every sense: going by at 65 mph, while going by day, by week, by year, ever onward until I've gone . . . by like a flower, like Uncle Elmer, like my childhood. Everything turns in on itself, rolling on, going on . . . gone. Bye.

GRIFFIN URBANIAK

the lost night

and even the stars hid their eyes

it was a night when even two electric fans
turned up to the highest gusts could
not cool the room. they turned back
and forth, heads oscillating on their
necks like mechanical dancers. the
tapestries flapped and billowed above
the bed like the skirts of victorian ghosts.
your face was turned to the wall, and i took
one sheet for comfort. i buried my face
in the sweaty pillow, thrashed and twisted,
upsetting the water bottle, upsetting the
stack of books, and finally at four a.m.,
saturday morning in july of 1995, you
awoke and asked me *what's wrong?*
i muttered something about going home
to get my pills, the knock-out pills, but
you told me to talk to you, talk to you.
so i opened my mouth and out came
the madness. it slithered around your
neck like a white worm. it wanted
to squeeze the sweat out of you. it
wanted to stick in its fangs and
suck you dry. it wanted to swallow
you whole and leave nothing but bones.
so your fight instinct came to the rescue—
you knew exactly how to kill me, with
the most pain and the least noise.
you suicide fucker, stand on your own feet.
all you kids want the easy way out.
isn't that what you said? never mind
that back when i was being molested
at three, you were planting your hillside
of pot. never mind that the amount
of mushrooms you've swallowed
could fill an omelet large enough
to feed the continent. and you

are no stranger to the sacred green
and yellow pill. each morning before
the medicine chest, you take communion
with a prozac cocktail. *easy way out,*
easy way out. i have heard enough.
i went back to sleep and when morning came
i left without a sound, marking one more loss
like a line of sidewalk chalk, a notch in
the bedpost, a scar across a wrist.

JANET E. WILLARD

Misery

licorice on the pavement
was kicked into the grass

it clung
when the wind blew

it lingered
though the rain
dissolved it slowly

it never broke up

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